





FROM SIOUX TO SUSAN



SUE ENJOYS A DRIVE WITH HER "PARSLEY-GIRL."

FROM SIOUX TO SUSAN

BY
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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
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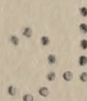
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TO
MY MOTHER

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FROM SIOUX TO SUSAN

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CHAPTER I

CHERRYFAIR

CHERRYFAIR had been painted white once upon a time, but the long years had tempered it to a melancholy gray and toned the cheerful shutters to a dull sage-green. Once it stood stately and beautiful, with its broad verandas and tall chimneys; but spiteful weathers of all sorts had snarled and worried and bit at it until, tired out with the battle, it had settled down to loneliness, a tumbledown, deserted old house.

But rain and shine, that had played such havoc with the house—that being man's work, the weather thought, and only fit to be destroyed—had nursed and coddled the growing things about it. Ivy clothed the old place, climbed the roof, and flung green banners even from the broken chimney tops; cherry-trees garlanded now with white and green, stretched great branches toward it; scraggy, untrimmed

lilacs tapped the second-story windows with their purple clusters; and an old, twisted trumpet-vine mounted the brick wall that edged the lawn and curled lovingly about the stone balls that crowned the gate posts; while dandelions and violets pushed their way between the cracks in the walk up to the worn stone steps.

It was the first of May, and the world was flooded with sunshine, bird-song, blossoms, and all things good; but the dilapidated old house drowsed on, and never once dreamed that the straggling procession that was making its way down the country lane already called it home. It was a jolly little procession that stepped to the happy music of the warm, green spring, and its line of march, under Sue's leadership, took in everything on both sides of the road. Betty was trying to keep her steps sedate, with her fat little hand tucked under her mother's arm; but Peggy, her twin, hippity-hopped in the middle of the road, now with Davie, who shied an ineffectual pebble at a squirrel, and now with Benny, who pranced like a fractious thoroughbred, only to be brought up again by Sue's vigorous calling. Phil whistled as he strode thoughtfully along, head thrown back, hands in his pockets; but Sue was everywhere, her black eyes dancing, her face alight, her

supple, slender body vibrant with joy. Their father—well, Betty said he behaved the worst of the lot, since he couldn't keep from running races with Sue, tweaking the twins' braids, nor tucking dandelions back of mother's ears; for somehow, the spring had got into his blood and was cutting capers with his dignity. But in spite of all this, he was no less a personage than the Rev. Albert Warner Roberts, the new pastor, who, finding the parsonage at Monroe entirely too small for his brood, had been forced to rent Cherryfair, a half mile from town, that being the only empty house to be found.

The Robertses had arrived by train that morning, quite unexpected by the good people of Monroe. It was really a deep-laid scheme of Sue's; leaving the train at the water tank, going down back streets and across lots, they had managed to evade notice, so that, as Sue said—she was always more forceful than elegant—"they might view their landscape o'er without the congregation tagging at their heels."

"How good the country smells!" exclaimed Peggy, sniffing joyfully and hippity-hopping so madly her flaxen pigtails wagged behind her. "My, but I'm glad there is such a lot of us; for if there had n't been, father would have

taken the parsonage, and we would have had to live in town. Parsonages are all alike."

"Why, Peggy Roberts, how can you say so?" returned Betty, her own step unconsciously for a moment falling in with her twin. "The downstairs bedroom is n't always on the same side of the hall, and the brown wall paper is sometimes in the parlor and sometimes it is n't—"

"But you very well know," joggled Peggy triumphantly, her breath coming in gasps, "there is a downstairs bedroom off a narrow hall, and brown paper forever and ever, and what is n't brown is sure to be gray. Other folks, except preachers, have wild roses, and honeysuckles, and creamy and pink things—"

"Mercy on us!" cried Sue, who had just returned from chasing the little boys down the road, her dark hair tossed about her face. "Who ever heard a Roberts grumbling about a little thing like wall paper? I'm perfectly ashamed of you, Peggy. Have n't we loved every roof that covered us, and have n't we had the dandiest times, and are n't we the jolliest, healthiest lot of youngsters? Answer me that, Margaret Fulton Roberts," she demanded, pelting the culprit with dandelions. "This is just an extra-beautiful time, because we have it all to ourselves."

“I’m afraid,” began Mrs. Roberts, looking up at her eldest daughter ruefully, “I really am afraid, Sue—”

“Now, Masie, don’t you spoil it all,” broke in Sue, popping her brown hand over her little mother’s mouth. “Please don’t begin about the reception with a brass band, veal loaf and lemonade. It ’s got to come, but let it rest in peace, just for to-day, and don’t, O Masie, don’t talk of stewards, or I can’t tell you what I *shall* do. I consented to be a minister’s daughter, you know, only because I was born to it, but we are out on a lark to-day, and we don’t want the flock.”

“It ’s only,” began Mrs. Roberts, shaking a most disapproving head at her disrespectful, but loving, daughter.

“Oh, I know perfectly,” interrupted Sue. “It ’s only that we have n’t, and never will belong to ourselves. But really, Masie, this is a between-whiles, when you come to think of it. We have left the Leesburgers and we have n’t got to the Monroers yet. Just look at father; who would believe he is threatened with a minister’s throat? Could Peggy hop like that if Mrs. Bleeker were here? And what would Mr. Martin say if he ’d see me with my pompadour over one ear, as it is this blessed

minute? ‘Nay, nay, Pauline!’ Let’s have a good time once in our lives unwatched; besides, we are in such ridiculous spirits it would never do for them to see us. Why, there isn’t a heavy heart among us!”

“Oh, Sue!” protested her mother.

“Well, is there?” laughed Sue. “Even Betty forgot her primness and hopped—Oh! jiminy crickets! We’re there! That’s the wall father told us about!”

With a rush and a scurry—even gentle little Mrs. Roberts was carried, for the moment, off her feet—they sped along the wall and stood at last between the great ball-topped posts. Surely never in all its history had that gateway been crowded with such eager, happy faces.

“Hello!” shouted Phil. “There’s an orchard!”

“A bay-window!” exclaimed Mrs. Roberts.

“A veranda!” sighed Betty.

“A knocker!” giggled Peggy.

“A barn!” squealed Davie.

“A-a-a-a cellar door!” panted little Ben.

“A-a-a-a—everything! The charmingest! quaintest! darlingest! You dear, horrid father! and you said it was an old tumbledown rookery, and we would have to try to be content!” Sue

flung herself upon her father's neck in a transport of rapture.

“Pooh, pooh!” chuckled Mr. Roberts, patting his impulsive daughter lovingly on the back. “It is so tumbledown I’m afraid most men would have dreaded its introduction to their family; but, you see, I know my chicks so well—my good little chicks and my little gray hen—trust them to find the sunny side of a necessity! Come, Phil, you and I will make a royal chariot and carry Masie in state. She’s the queen of this palace. Here is the key, Sue; you unlock the door, and you children fall in behind, single file. Up you go, little lady!”

There in the Queen’s chair rode the little mother, so proud and happy, one arm around her merry husband’s neck, and the other about her sturdy, laughing son; behind came the excited children, and before danced Sue.

“This is the very best time we ever *did* have,” said Sue, as she fitted the big key into the lock with a flourish. “This key is so big it makes me think of castles, and dungeons, and things. Are you sure, father, there’s not a dungeon in the cellar? I’d love to keep potatoes in a dungeon. There, the key turned! Shut your eyes, everybody! Behold!” and she flung open the door.

The Robertses stood dumb with amazement. Here was a surprise for Mr. Roberts, too; and it came so suddenly, so unexpectedly, and meant so much of loving helpfulness and kindness from his new people—no one noticed the queer, choking sound in his throat; but when his wife saw a tear steal out and go sliding down his cheek, she wiped it lovingly away and said softly:

“There, dears, put me down. This is certainly a beautiful home-coming.”

“And to think,” groaned Sue, a heap of contrition, from the lowest stair-step, “that I scorned the flock! I just dared Masie to talk of stewards, and now this—I shall go down on my knees to them!”

When Sue threw open the door of Cherry-fair, the family had expected to find the barren gloom, the musty, dusty, fustiness of a house long closed to sun and air. They had expected to see grimy floors and stained walls, for Mr. Roberts, hoping to charm them by the out-of-doors, and not wishing to disappoint them in the house, had kept its good points to himself, and prepared them for all its discomforts. They had expected days and days of scouring and cleaning, of setting to rights and furbish-

ing, before there would be a spot with the air of home.

A low, wide hall with an open stairway led to the second floor, while a bay-window overlooked a quaint old garden; there was a fireplace on the side, and beside it an arch opening into the parlor. This much their father had told them; but what of the fresh paper, all green and cream and gold; the pretty green carpet; the dainty curtains looped back that the lilacs might peep in; the low book case by the window; the mass of ferns that filled the fireplace and trailed out over the shining brass fender; the wicker chairs; the little tea-table; the pictures on the wall? And in a green vase, a branch of cherry-bloom upheld a card.

Mr. Roberts rubbed his eye-glasses vigorously and cleared his throat many times before he could read what was written there:

“Accept, with the love of the whole congregation, this bit of brightness for your home-coming.”

“I’ve always thought,” said Betty, solemnly, addressing no one in particular, “that we have the most beautiful things happen to us a family ever had, and now I know it!”

But here, for Sue, happiness was getting too

near tears; and before any one guessed what was to happen next, she had sprung to her feet:

“All join hands,” she cried; “it’s time for a jubilee!”

“Oh, Sue, not on the new carpet!” exclaimed Mrs. Roberts, as Phil seized her on one side and Davie on the other.

“In the parlor, then; we can’t hurt anything there;” and Sue dragged her father through the arch. Here, in the big, empty room, where, through the half-closed shutters, the sunlight was painting yellow bars upon the bare floor, they gaily chanted the nonsense verse that Mr. Roberts had made for Sue and Phil when they were tots, and to which every little Roberts had danced miles, a foolish little song which they all loved dearly. It had helped them through many a hard place, and expressed their joy in many a happy one:

“Whoopsy saw, sine craw,
The Robertses come to town,
With troubles a-plenty, but never a frown;
Their laughter goes up, and no tears run down.
Whoopsy saw, sine craw,
When the Robertses come to town!”

Around and around they went until Davie’s head swam, and Ben’s fat bare legs, twinkling



AROUND AND AROUND THEY WENT.

in and out of the golden bars, fairly winked in the checkered gloom as he flew by, while above the clatter of their feet upon the floor their merry singing rang through the empty house.

“Mercy!” gasped little Mrs. Roberts, quite out of breath with prancing and singing, her hat knocked rakishly to one side, her back hair slipped from its fastenings. “Do have mercy on a poor old lady who can’t keep up. O children, I’m really past the age for this sort of thing!”

In a moment she was surrounded by a breathless, laughing group, exclaiming, pitying, to be tenderly led out to a seat on the veranda steps until she had quite recovered. Mr. Roberts found that he, too, was glad to drop down by her side, to fan her with his hat while he rested after such unusual exertion.

“Now, my dears,” he said, looking at his watch. “It is half-past nine, and at eleven we must be at Mr. Reed’s, so I think we would better settle down to business. While Masie and I rest a bit, suppose, Sue, you and the children look over the house, and come back and report. By that time we old folks will be ready to take a hand.”

Ever since Sue Roberts could remember she had known responsibilities. The little mother

had never been very strong, money was so scarce in the family treasury, and the babies had crowded so fast into the home nest, that, in spite of Mr. and Mrs. Roberts' longing to give their oldest daughter a care-free childhood, burdens had slipped upon her slender shoulders not often borne by so young a girl. But, somehow, the burdens had never seemed to hurt Sue—perhaps because she had always taken them with such breezy good-humor. Luckily for them all, Sue could get so much real delight out of so little, that the younger Roberts had hardly felt the pinch of poverty; for, as they said, "Sue always knows just what to do to make a good time."

Sue had the happiest and most rollicking of dispositions. If she was careless, somewhat disorderly, and often rude, she was sincere, helpful, and loving. If she was slangy, wilful and thoughtless, she was truthful, brave and cheerful. She had plenty of faults, but more virtues; and no one knew her who did not respect the downright honesty of her character.

"As hoity-toity a child as ever breathed, but a most lovable and unselfish," Judge Fulton was wont to say; for Sue's tomboy ways had never hidden her real worth from her uncle's

loving eyes. It was Aunt Serena who replied with a groan:

“But, oh, David, so undignified, so unrefined! I should think it would break Albert’s heart—Mary is so mild I don’t suppose a roaring lion would jostle her calm soul. Elizabeth is a little lady, and I have the greatest hopes for Margaret and the boys; but Susan, a great girl of fourteen—in spite of her capabilities, is absolutely impossible! Yes, my dear, I remember perfectly what I was like at her age, and that’s the very thing that makes me so anxious about her. What she needs is severe discipline, and she will never get it in that happy-go-lucky home.”

Even those who loved Sue best were forced to admit there was a good deal of truth in Aunt Serena’s assertion. But, when it came to seeing to the home life, the welfare, the happiness, even the finances of the family, it was Sue who joyfully carried a good deal more than her share. But, as her father said, she was like a chestnut burr, all prickles on the outside, yet wholesome and sweet within.

Now at her father’s command, her head went up like a young captain, and in a moment she had marshaled her little company before her. They all knew it was Sue who would determine

everything, from where the piano should stand to where the smallest frying pan must hang. It was Sue who would choose her father's study, and decide if the parlor carpet could be turned, if the dining-room curtains would stand darning, or if there should be new ones. So now, with her little notebook open, her stumpy pencil between her teeth, she seemed a very different person from the romping girl who had been running races in the road only a few moments before.

The kind work of the congregation, Sue found, had not stopped with the pretty hall; for the whole house had been beautifully cleaned, and several rooms were newly papered. Even the cellar had been freshly whitewashed, and Phil discovered, greatly to the joy of Davie and Ben, rows and rows of enticing little jam and jelly pots glowing with amber and ruby, that had evidently just been placed upon the clean papers of the fruit cupboard. On the dining-room mantel was a big bowl of lilies-of-the-valley, while in the open kitchen window stood a pot of parsley, and in it, tucked among the pretty green, was a card on which, scribbled in a girlish hand, Sue read:

"To flavor the soup and the savory stew,
This pot of parsley is given to you,
Dear rollicking, merry, minister's Sue;"

while pinned to a new tea-towel was a bit of paper that informed them, to the delight of the twins, that:

“Sweet as any violet,
Are Elizabeth and Margaret,
Drying goblet, plate and cup,
Upon this brand new towelet.”

“It’s dreadful poetry,” laughed Sue, “but it makes it seem as if somebody who knew and loved us was going to jump out and say, ‘boo!’ any minute, and that does give one such a lovely, creepy feeling.”

At each fresh discovery a messenger ran post-haste to tell the good news to father and mother out on the veranda. Davie and Ben fought valiantly upon the way over this honor, only to rush breathlessly back in hope of more news.

“It is just as if a fairy godmother had been here and left lovely bits of welcome everywhere,” said Betty, her eyes shining, as she stood tracing with a plump forefinger the honeysuckle sprays on the pretty wall paper of the bedroom Sue had just assigned to the twins. The boys had gone to investigate the barn. “It is so dear of you, Sue, to give us this pretty room. I’m afraid it is awfully selfish

of us to have this, when you take that back room with the old red paper."

"Stuff and nonsense!" replied Sue, as she stepped off the floor to see if the striped green matting would cover it. "Just you lay low and see how my room turns out, girlyies. Won't father's study be fine, with that big window to the east? I do believe there will be enough of the old red Brussels Aunt Serena sent to cover the floor. If only we could get new curtains for the parlor, would n't it be dandy?"

"Oh, Sue!" grieved Betty, "*dandy!*"

"Well, would n't it?" argued Sue. "Jim-dandy, if you like that better. I do wonder who the parsley-girl is, and how she knew I cooked and you washed dishes. Father has been telling tales, I believe."

"Who's talking about me?" called Mr. Roberts from the stairs. "Here we come, although I know very well Sue has us all settled."

"Oh, Masie!" screamed the twins, flying to her side. "Come see—come see our room!"

"We've got the honeysuckle room. Is n't it lovely of Sue to give it to us?" cried Peggy, dancing up and down; "and we are to have the green matting, if Sue can cut the holes out, and the dresser with the leg off!"

"I do wish we could have ruffled curtains,"

broke in Betty; "they give things such an air."

"This is your room, Masie, dear," and Sue flung open the door of a big room with an outlook over the orchard. "Father, your study is this corner room toward the garden and away from the noise; this big room is for the boys, and this is mine."

"And Sue's got schemes, Masie, and she won't tell a word," explained Peggy, as they all stood looking into the rather uninteresting room Sue had chosen for herself.

"Up to your old tricks, daughterling," observed Mr. Roberts, putting a loving arm about his slender girl. "We'll have to watch you, or you will spoil us all."

"Now, Sue, let me take this room—" began her mother.

"You make me perfectly weary," declared Sue, vehemently, hammering her father's broad shoulder with her little brown fist. "If you say another word I will run off and let you settle alone, and how would you like that? I'm so tired of this song and dance about my unselfishness; I'm a regular old pig, but you love me so hard you can't see it. I took this dinky little room because I see its possibilities; and I'll be jolly in it. I just love the whole ca-

boodle of you, and now I think we'd better skedaddle for Mr. Reed's."

"Susan, what language! Where do you hear such things?" groaned her father, yet laughing in spite of himself.

"Oh, Sue, I do hope you will be more careful for your father's sake, if not for your own," protested Masie. "What will the new people think of us all, if you talk like that?"

"Don't you worry, Masie." Sue flew at her mother to drop a contrite kiss on the end of her nose. "I'm going to be as proper as an etiquette book and as meek as a sheep. You'll think you have another Betty. Now, twinsies, hunt up the boys, for we really must be going."

"Indeed we must," agreed Mr. Roberts, consulting his watch, "the train upon which they are expecting us is due in an hour, and we must not allow them to make a useless trip to the station."

"Heigho!" sighed Sue, as she slowly went down the steps, looking back longingly at the house. "Our lark is over, and once more we belong to the flock; so no more high jinks for Susie. But they are a blessed flock and I love 'em! Father, who do you suppose is the parsley-girl?"

CHAPTER II

THE REVOLT OF SUSAN PLENTY

GAY times came to Cherryfair. The sound of the tackhammer was heard in the house, the rending of crates, the opening of boxes and of barrels, the scurrying of feet, the calling of merry voices, and now and then the wails of Benny, who, in his great anxiety not to miss anything that was going on, was under everybody's feet, getting continually trodden upon. Sue suggested the best thing to do would be to put him in a pen, as they had the little pig Farmer Bowers had brought over to Davie the day before, and who was now squealing pathetically back of the barn.

The week spent in getting acquainted with the congregation of Monroe, while they awaited the coming of their household goods, had been one full of pleasure to the Robertses. The pretty old town with its wide, shady streets, the comfortable houses set far back upon their broad lawns, and the genial, kindly hospitality of the people, after three years spent in a crude,

new factory town, were delightful. There had been only one real disappointment to Sue, and that was she had failed to find her parsley-girl.

Good Mrs. Reed laughed merrily when Sue at once enquired for her, describing in her vivid way what she expected her to be like, and her great anxiety to meet her new friend.

"I can't think who it can be," said Mrs. Reed as she served the "floating island" with a lavish hand, "unless it is Fanny Spencer. She did n't say a word the day we were working there, but her mother has a great deal of parsley in her borders. Then again it might be Avis Taylor; she's a regular chatterbox, but a sweet, good child."

But Sue knew the moment she met them that it was neither Fanny nor Avis, although they were both charming girls, nor was it Pink Morris, Belle Wilkin nor Mildred Warner.

"I don't know why, Masie," Sue had said the morning after the church reception, as she stood combing her hair in Mrs. Reed's spare chamber, "but I felt, before I asked them, that I had n't found her. They are all dandy, but they have n't the right sort of tone for my parsley-girl. I'm so afraid I'll never find her, for the girls say I have met every one of their set except Martha Cutting, and she was n't out at

Cherryfair that day, and yesterday she went to Dexter to visit her aunt, and so was n't at the reception. That shows she did n't care much about meeting me, does n't it?"

"Perhaps she had made arrangements to go, before she knew of the reception," suggested Mrs. Roberts. "I thought all the girls had very pretty manners. Oh, Sue!"

"I know, Masie," groaned Sue, jabbing the hair-pins fiercely into her pompadour. "Was n't that awful when I could n't think of the name of the chandelier and called it a thingumajig right before that lovely old Doctor Burton? Poor Betty blushed until I thought she'd catch fire. But I could n't think of the name of the old thing to save my life. Every time I want to be nice I just go and disgrace you all."

Her mother, seeing the tears glistening in the black eyes—Sue was little given to crying—drew her head down and kissed her fondly.

"You are such a dear, good girl, Sue," she said lovingly, "that I can't bear to have you spoiled by such rudeness. It is like an ugly mask you hold up before you, so that the world may not see the true, sweet girl behind it. It is so unladylike and unrefined."

"But that is just it, Masie, I know I'll shock

you, but I don't want to be ladylike nor refined. I just hate old conventions, I want to be strong and forceful and independent. I like slang because it is so expressive. I don't care a penny what other people think. It is only that father and you and the rest suffer over me so—that 'most breaks my heart.'"

Mrs. Roberts sighed deeply as she replied:

"Well, Sue, like all mothers, I want to save you pain; to try and stand between you and the hurts life will bring, but I am afraid you will have to learn for yourself that this world would be a most uncomfortable place without its conventions, and that your ideas of strength and independence are very far from what is best."

But Sue to-day, with a scarlet handkerchief tied around her curly head, a scarlet apron buttoned about her slim body, was a gay and picturesque little figure, as she flew upstairs and down, issuing orders, clearing the way, suggesting, planning, comforting, cheering.

"Now," she said at last, "I'm going down to get lunch, and I want Masie to settle right down on the couch for a couple of winks, and father to cuddle down here on this mattress—not a word of protest! I'll tuck Masie up with this table cover and she'll be off to the Land of Nod like a lamplighter. Here, father, that

cushion is like lead, but here is a nice old, softy pillow. Cuddle down, bairnies, cuddle down! Come on, kids! Phil can help me fix the table with the boards on the barrels, Betty can set it, and Peggy help me cook. Davie and Ben would better run out and see about the pig. Shoo, shoo!" and catching up her scarlet apron with both hands, she drove them down the stair before her.

Laughing and singing they trooped into the kitchen with Sue dancing behind; but at the door they all stopped in astonishment.

"O Sue," cried Ben, his eyes round as moons, "somebody has been here!"

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" Sue exclaimed, dropping into a chair and throwing her apron over her head. "It's that parsley-girl again, bless her!"

And it was—it truly was! For who but the "parsley-girl" could have entered the house without being seen, could have worked so deftly and so quietly; and who else would have set a rhyme in the midst of the red tulips that stood in the centre of the improvised table?

"Why, Sue!" cried Davie, jumping wildly up and down, "she put the boards on the barrel just like we do. I guess the parsley-girl has moved too."

“But where did she find the tablecloth and things?” asked Betty dazedly. “I put them all away in the pantry after breakfast.”

“She found them because she is a girl after my own heart,” cried Sue, flinging off the apron and rushing to the door; “because when she wants to help she finds a way, and does n’t stand around talking about it. But now she’s gone, and where will we find her?”

“She can’t be far”—Phil was already down the steps. “Come on; let’s go hunt her! You can run around that side of the barn, Sue, and I’ll go this. Betty and Peggy can hunt in the orchard, and the kids run around the house. Hurry up; we’ll catch her!”

But five minutes afterward they came back panting, and no one had found her.

“I was certain I heard her giggle back of a lilac bush,” puffed Davie, flinging himself down on the doorstep; “but when I looked it was nothing but an old hen that flew out squawking.”

“I found this,” shrieked Peggy, tearing around the house waving a pink sunbonnet over her head. “I found it hanging on a currant-bush down by the orchard wall, and I saw a girl just flying over the meadow, and she

stopped and waved her hand at me as she climbed the fence!"

"Who can she be? We don't know a soul that lives on that side of us. I can't understand it at all," wailed Sue, as she searched for some clue in the pink bonnet.

But, fresh and dainty as a rose, from the perky little bow on top to the fluted ruffle of its frill, the pink bonnet kept its secret. So did the custard pie, the crisp rolls, the slices of pink boiled ham set all about with parsley, and the yellow pat of butter, all waiting so demurely to be eaten; even the rhyme among the tulips only sent their curiosity to fever heat:

"O minister's Sue
But I love you —
Your scarlet apron
And black eyes, too,
For you my heart is beating true,
O black-eyed minister's Sue!"

"How does she know you have black eyes, Sue Roberts?" demanded Betty. "Except Ben, you are the only one of us that has! And how does she know that you've got a scarlet apron? You only put it on this morning. I don't like her, for I just believe she's a spook, or something."

“Spooks don’t bring custard pies nor wear pink bonnets, let me tell you, Miss Betty. But I don’t care if she is twenty spooks, she is the blessedest one I ever heard of, and I just love her!” and Sue rapturously hugged the pink bonnet to her breast. “Do run and call father and Masie, Davie, here is the teakettle boiling itself away on the oil-stove; and here is the tea in the pot. That dear, parsley-girl did n’t forget a thing; and to think that I can’t even thank her.”

Little by little Cherryfair changed from a forlorn, dilapidated house to the coziest of home nests. Of course, there was always the delight of the pretty hall—that was such a comfort! It was there Sue ran a dozen times a day to “refresh” herself, as she explained, by a glimpse of something really new and dainty and settled—something that required no refurbishing, no painting, nor any patching to make it presentable.

“The person who said, ‘two moves are as bad as a fire,’ must have been a minister’s daughter,” laughed Sue, as one morning she pulled ruefully at the dislocated arm of the best oak rocker. “I don’t believe we’ve got a single piece of furniture that is n’t a cripple. Just look at that jigger in the corner. It

has n't a leg to stand on, the marble is cracked, and the railing off—"

"Now, don't say, Sue Roberts, that you are going to turn that old washstand into a grand piano," begged Betty, dramatically, as she sat whisking the dust from under the buttons on the old sofa. "We've turned everything turnable, and I'd like to see one piece of furniture that was n't pretending to be something else."

"You'd better not say that, Betty," giggled Peggy, from her corner, where she was rubbing the dining-room table with sweet oil and vinegar; "or she might not turn those old Swiss skirts into sash-curtains for our room—and where would we be, then?"

"Oh, but she promised, and nobody ever knew Sue to go back on that kind of a promise. Go on, Sue; I was only funning."

"Uh?" inquired Sue, absently, still wiggling the dislocated arm. "Benny, please run upstairs for the glue and a string. Excuse me, Betty; I was so interested in diagnosing the case of this poor chair, I did n't hear you."

"Never mind what I said; but look here, Sue, what *are* you going to have in your room? Ours is lovely, and you have nothing but that cot and the cherry desk. Why, it will be worse than a barn."

“Oh, don’t trouble about me. Bareness is rather swell, Betty, after you get used to it. As Aunt Serena said about my sailor-hat, ‘simple and chaste,’ you know. Goodness gracious! what was that?” she cried, as an unearthly screech rent the air.

“It’s Phil,” exclaimed Peggy, rushing to the door. “He’s tearing down the lane waving something over his head.”

“It’s a letter, I suppose,” said Betty, going on briskly with her brushing. “Father sent him to the postoffice just after breakfast. It is some old advertisement. Phil would n’t go to all that trouble if it was worth anything. He’ll see you, Peggy. He is just dying to have us rush out on the veranda! Let’s appear perfectly indifferent when he comes up.”

“I’ll duck behind the curtain if he looks this way,” promised Peggy. “But I really believe it is a letter, for it’s in a square envelope.”

By this time Phil was coming up the walk, still running and flourishing a creamy missive over his head.

“There,” he panted, as he reached the steps and flung himself down with evidences of great fatigue; “I could n’t have gotten here any sooner if I had been the lightning-express. You girls are mighty cool, it seems to me. It



SUE.

is n't every brother who would have come all that way at a 2.40 gait. See if this chap does, next time! One would think you got three letters a day. All right! since nobody seems interested enough to inquire, I guess I'll read it myself," and leisurely drawing out his jack-knife, he settled himself comfortably to open the letter. In spite of herself, Peggy leaned as far out from the curtain as she dared without being seen.

"Miss Susan Plenty Roberts, Monroe, Ohio," she read aloud. "Why, Sue, it's for you—and he's *opening* it!"

"You can imagine my feelings," gasped Phil—Sue, making a sudden dive for him, had rescued her letter to the great danger to her fingers—"when the postman read that address aloud, and asked me if it belonged to any relative of mine! Susan Plenty! I felt my ears grow crimson! Sue, if I had such a name as that I'd amputate it."

"It's all very well for you to poke fun at poor me," said Sue, dolefully, as her father and mother, in answer to Peggy's shrill summons, appeared in the doorway—a letter to the Roberts children was an event, and always read to the assembled family. "Come on, father and mother. It's from Aunt Serena, and

it's a lecture, I know, for I felt it in the air all the time I was there. Now, Davie and Ben, *please!* don't both sit on me at once! I was just saying," she went on, when she had gotten Davie cosily established on one side and Benny in her lap, "that it is all very well for Phil to make fun of my name, when each of the other children have a lovely name. It's a perfect shame, I think. I don't care if I was named for my grandmothers—I'll bet a picayune they hated their old names like fun. The only comfort I had was that Sue P. Roberts did n't sound quite so awful, and one could only guess at the middle letter. It might stand for Phyllis or Portia—"

"Or Peter, Presbyterian, or Prickly Pear," murmured Phil, softly.

"But now that Aunt Serena has taken up the Susan Plenty," and Sue, turning up her nose at her teasing brother, took no farther notice of him, "I suppose I must grin and bear it."

"Never mind," comforted Peggy, cuddling down with her head on Sue's shoulder. "I think Sue is a dear, funny name, much nicer than Peggy."

"My dear Susan Plenty," read Sue, pretending to adjust an eyeglass and tipping her chin

to a saucy angle: "As I write those two beautiful old names I find myself wishing you would show more inclination to grow up to them. You know, my dear child, I am a great believer in the influence of names, and therefore gave my children fine, strong ones—"

"Meaning Jacob William, Simor John, and Ellen Jane," chuckled Phil.

"And," went on Sue, "I have always thought it has had much to do with their noble characters. It has grieved me that your dear parents have allowed nicknames. Your father was always Albert, and I, Serena, in our home, as he will remember. Do, my child, try to feel the real dignity of such names as yours, and remember you are a minister's daughter, and therefore much is expected of you.

"I do not want to be unkind nor fault-finding, Susan; but the truth is, we all love you so much for your unselfishness and your loveliness that we are apt to forgive in you many things that we would condemn in another girl." Sue was reading bravely, her voice loud and clear, but there was a storm brewing and its crimson signal was flaming in her cheeks. "I tried to say this when you were with us, but you were so sweet and thoughtful of your uncle and me, I had not the heart to utter it. But

the more I have thought about a girl who says 'you bet' and 'fierce,' and who says she can't see why every one makes so much fuss about a hole in a stocking, wearing gentle old Grandmother Plenty Roberts's ruby ring and her gold beads, the more unsuitable it seems, and I feel that it is to Elizabeth and Margaret they should belong. So now that you are going into your new home, and I am sending the usual box, I am going to give you your Uncle Martin's Indian collection—the Navajo blanket is quite valuable and so are the peace pipes. Tomahawks and elks' teeth should please, it seems to me, a girl with your ideas far better than gold or gems. The ring I am sending to Elizabeth—”

“And she promised it to me ever since I can remember!” cried Sue, throwing the letter on the floor. “She is horrid—perfectly horrid!”

“I won't take the ring, Sue; indeed I won't,” protested Betty.

“She can keep her old Indian stuff,” stormed Sue. “Don't tell me, Masie, I admired it; that only makes it all the worse. I never dreamed she was going to throw it at me, did I, and keep the things that were really mine?”

“Listen, Sue,” said her father, picking up the letter and handing it to her so politely she

was forced to take it with some show of grace. "Aunt Serena is exactly right. She does say out plainly what she means, but surely she has earned that right, for if ever a girl has had a kind, generous aunt—"

"Oh, I know she's been just lovely, and I'm acting like a beast; but I *am* grateful, and she always is picking at my manners."

"I suppose she sees how little your mother and I have accomplished by tenderness; and really, Sue, I think, like Aunt Serena, that a girl who so hates conventions would consider this a most appropriate gift. The ring is hers and if she prefers Betty should have it—"

"You don't understand, father. It is n't that I don't want Betty to have the ring," broke in Sue, beseechingly. "It is n't that I think I deserve it, nor that I would n't love to have the Indian things when I get used to the thought of it; but she had promised, *promised*, and now, as a sort of punishment, she withholds it and gives me something else."

"I see just how she feels, she promised them to S-u-e, not S-i-o-u-x, but if you insist on behaving like the latter, I suppose Aunt Serena thinks the savage would prefer the gift most suited to her needs."

"Father Roberts!" cried Sue, upsetting

Benny from her lap in her impetuous rush at her father. "Do you think I behave like a *Sioux*? 'Pon honor, now!"

"I have n't a doubt," said her father, pushing the dark hair back from her brow and smiling at her lovingly, "that there is many a gentle little squaw who would scorn to use language it pained her mother and father to hear. But for all that, I know the worth of my Sioux, and love her with all my heart."

"In spite of, and not because of. Eh, father?" inquired Sue, roguishly. Then suddenly her black eyes began dancing as mischievously as ever, and springing upon a footstool she began a proclamation:

"Hear ye, all my people, I have tried to live up to my name and station for almost fifteen years—I began very young, you see—and I have made, according to my Aunt Serena and my beloved father, a most dismal failure. Now, since my relatives say I act like a red man—a red girl, I mean—I might as well take an Indian name and live up—no, *down*—to that, and be sure of a great success. So, behold me, no longer Susan Plenty, but S-i-o-u-x; and I'll make the stunningest wigwam, with my peace pipes and tomahawks, out

of my dingy back room. Just wait until you see. Hurrah for Aunt Serena!”

“Oh, Sue, you are utterly irrepressible; you rebound like a rubber ball,” sighed her mother. “I believe you would find the sunny side of an iceberg.”

“Of course I should,” replied Sue, laughingly. “What would be the use of staying on the shady side? I would only freeze my toes. Now let us see what else Aunt Serena has to say. Bless her, her bark is always a great deal worse than her bite! Cheer up, twinsies; Sue is all over her tantrum, and you are as welcome to the ring and beads as flowers that bloom in the Spring, tra-la! Just wait until you see my wigwam. It is going to be a dandy!”

CHAPTER III

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

“**T**HERE was a goose of Syracuse,
And full of fun was he,”

warbled Sue, as she rubbed the wrinkled panes until they glistened in the sun. “Diamonds are as nothing to these windows, if you don’t care what you say,” she grumbled, as she gave the last greenish square an extra flourish. “This glass has as many eyes as a potato. But then, who ever heard of windows in a wigwam, any way! So I’m not going to be the Indian to complain if they are a bit blistered, for they are a lot better than none. Now, the next thing is for me to get into my duds and hie me to the carpenter’s.”

She was talking to herself, for a strange silence had settled upon Cherryfair, and for once she was alone. There was no clatter of children’s feet, no shrill calling of children’s voices; for, in spite of protest, Mr. Roberts had marshaled the whole five off to school that Monday morning, saying the half-mile twice a

day would be good for them, and that there was no use of their losing six weeks of study. In fact, Sue had escaped only after faithful promises that two hours of each day should be set aside for lessons.

The house, after a week of hard work, was quite settled, except for Sue's room. She was still abiding with the chaste simplicity of the cot and cherry desk, as Aunt Serena's box had not yet arrived. Since Mandy Dobbin, big, buxom, and willing, had taken charge of the family, the housework was moving along more smoothly than it did under Sue's impetuous reign. Mrs. Roberts now found time to sit in her pleasant room—though, as Sue groaned, Masie's sitting down only meant the appearance of a peck of stockings to mend or a quart of buttons to sew on. As for Sue, Mandy's strong hand on the rudder gave her the most glorious hours of freedom to do all the hundred and one tasks she had set herself, beside the two hours for her music, for which she had almost despaired of ever finding time.

The twins turned most reluctant feet toward school that morning. Their round faces were as nearly long as their dimpled chins would admit, as Sue tied the bows on their flaxen pigtails and buttoned them into their

blue, ruffled frocks. It might, they admitted, be hard for Phil to desert the dam he was building in the brook, and for Davie and Ben to part company with their beloved pig; but for them to leave Sue, who might be up to all sorts of the most delightful capers and they not there to see—this was cruel! How could any one ever tell what she would do next, since she never knew herself? They would not have been so unwilling to start to school—for they were clever little girls and fond of their books—if their father had only insisted upon Sue's going, too; for then she would have been unable to have accomplished anything very remarkable without their discovering it. But now she would have long, unwatched hours to scheme and plan. When Sue had given her solemn promise not to open the box should it arrive, and to try not to do anything especially exciting until their return, they were somewhat comforted, and after a last clinging embrace, obediently trotted off after their father.

The clock on the hall mantel was just striking ten as Sue came running down the stairs, singing at the top of her voice, pinning on her hat as she came, her jacket flying out like cardinal wings.

“Good-by, Masie,” she called to her mother,



SHE WAS CUTTING OUT A WAIST FOR BENNY.

as she reached the bottom step. "I'm going over to Mr. Judd now for a moulding."

"Wait a moment, dear," replied Mrs. Roberts. She was cutting out a waist for Benny on the dining-room table. "Come here until I look you over."

Sue came reluctantly, pulling her hat farther over her eyes and trying to look unconcerned.

"Are all the buttons on your shoes?" asked her mother, when she appeared in the doorway. "Is the binding mended upon your skirt? Is your collar on straight?"

"O mother," cried Sue, "I can't stop to sew on buttons now. I did so hope I could get off without your seeing me. Now, who's going to know there is a button off—it's the second from the top—and there is just the teeniest rip in the binding. Necker is all right, is n't it?"

"It is almost straight in front, turn around and let me see. Sue, you are exactly like an ostrich; if your head is covered you think you are safe; and so, if you get your hat on at a becoming angle you imagine you will do. My child, I never saw a worse case of pinning. Sit right down here; you will find needle and thread in my work-basket. The shoe-buttons are in that box."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Sue; but she reluctantly

sat down. "There, Masie, dear; don't look so ashamed. I'll do it beautifully before you can say 'Jack Robinson.' It's just one button off and a few stitches to take."

"It's just the difference between tidiness and untidiness," said Mrs. Roberts, as she tore off a width of gingham. "My mother always told me that a true lady could not wear a stocking with a hole in it, and as for a button off, or a ripped skirt binding, that was not to be imagined."

"Do you know, Masie"—Sue had divested herself of her skirt and was examining with astonishment the "teeniest" rip that had to be held with two pins and yet left a graceful loop lurking for an unwary heel—"do you know, I believe my bindings and buttons are bewitched. Just look at that! I remember now that it was n't an inch long when I started to church yesterday; and then in the afternoon I put in the other pin, and *now* look at it! My, what a careless thing I am!" Sue smiled benignly. "I wonder you put up with me, dearie. I ought to be ashamed of myself."

"That's just it," and Mrs. Roberts looked over at her daughter with a quizzical smile. "You ought to be, but are you? There is something deliciously Irish about you, Sue, that

has been working for you and saving you hard raps all your life. You took all reproof so sweetly when you were a little thing that you missed many a scolding you richly deserved. It was always 'I ought to be ashamed,' so father and I forgave and tried to forget until—it is hard to say it—your being ashamed never means turning over a new leaf. It never means 'I'm really going to do better.' When Phil says to me—it's always a long time coming—but when he says, 'Masie, I'm sorry,' I know every atom of his will is to be used to overcome his fault; but with you, my daughter, it is promise to-day and break it to-morrow."

"I know it," sighed Sue, her eyes so blurred that her needle looked twenty. "I know it, Masie; yet I really, truly mean it at the time—but someway—I'm no good at all. I'm rude and rough and unstable and untidy—"

"And yet," broke in her mother, laying a gentle hand on the drooping head, "with all those faults you are the very comfort of our hearts. There never was a more unselfish daughter and sister, never a more wholesome nor a sweeter nature under this flash-in-the-pan temper. But it is n't enough to be sweet, unselfish and wholesome. Father and I want to see you—since you object to the fine old-

fashioned word 'lady'—a womanly woman, and slang and noise and lost shoe-buttons can never belong to her."

"No-o-o-o, I suppose not," sighed Sue, and she contritely twisted her thimble round and round upon her finger. "If father was n't a minister, and I had n't been the oldest and a girl, I don't suppose I would have showed up so. Really and truly, Masie, I want to be good—not namby-pamby good, but beautifully, magnificently good, like my own dear mother, and do strong, brave deeds."

"And father and I, Sue," returned her mother, as she sat down and took up her work. "are not thinking of the grand, brave thing you are dreaming of; but we are hoping and praying to see you strong enough to conquer your own spirit and your own weaknesses. Strong and brave enough to build a lovely character."

It was a sober Sue that kissed her mother and walked sedately down the steps between the tall gate posts; but when you are fourteen and a June sky as blue as a turquoise is over your head, meadow-larks calling to you from the fields, and wild roses waving to you from the roadside, it takes more than a knowledge of your faults to keep your spirits down.

"I must be a bad lot," remarked Sue, sorrowfully, to a chipmunk on the fence; "a wery, wery bad lot; but don't you tell the gray squirrels, for they are such gossips. Come, let's have a race," and away went Sue down the road, the chipmunk just far enough ahead to make the race exciting, until, at the very turn of the lane, with a last flourish of his tail, he vanished into a stump that stood in the fence corner.

"Good-by, if you call that going," laughed Sue, every trace of her troubles banished, and turning the corner into the road with such speed that she almost ran down a pony-carriage that was coming briskly toward her.

The driver, with a shrill little scream, jerked the line so sharply that the pony stopped on the very edge of a steep embankment.

"George, but that was a close shave!" cried a tall, pale boy who was leaning back among pillows in the little carriage. "Drive up, Virginia; he might step off yet."

"I—I beg your pardon," panted Sue, her cheeks flaming as she stood in the middle of the road, her hat awry, her hair tossed about her gypsy face, her skirt and shoes white with dust. "I—I was racing with a chipmunk."

"Oh, you were," replied the tall boy, coldly,

though he politely lifted his hat. "Well, don't let us detain you, or the chipmunk might win."

Sue's cheeks grew hotter. She was in a blaze of rage, so angry she hardly noticed the quiet girl who sat beside the boy. A gypsy face as brown as her own, with hair as dark and eyes as black, but there the resemblance ceased. Her silky hair was coiled softly at the back of her small, graceful head; the eyes were soft and beseeching, her face was not nearly so pretty as Sue's, but very gentle and winning. But Sue only saw she was near her own age, stylishly dressed, and very much distressed by the boy's rudeness.

"You must excuse my brother," the girl said in a soft, low voice that had a pretty little ripple in it. "He has been very ill, and is still nervous."

"Nervous! Great snakes! Virginia," broke in the boy, "one doesn't need to be nervous not to care to be upset into a ditch. Do drive on; one never knows where the natives around here will break out next."

"I'm not a native," snapped Sue, her eyes flashing, "and I think you are very rude. It was silly of me to rush along like that, but I begged your pardon."

“Not a native?” inquired the boy. “Really now!”

“I’m Sue P. Roberts, the minister’s daughter,” said Sue, with all the dignity she could command, but plainly angrier than ever; “and we have just moved here.”

“Susan Pepperpot. Oh, I see!” murmured the boy, dreamily.

“Thad, I’m ashamed of you,” cried his sister, her own cheeks flaming. “Indeed, Miss Roberts, I hope you will forgive him. He really is very nervous. I . . . I should love such a race myself, and I do hope you won’t feel hurt at a sick boy’s irritability.”

“Indeed, I won’t,” promised Sue, seeing tears shining in the dark eyes, her quick sympathy going out to the girl’s evident distress. “Don’t you worry about it at all, for I know all about it. After my brother Phil had the measles he was a perfect bear; and I guess I am somewhat of a pepperpot sometimes—at least I was peppery a moment ago. I do hope I have n’t made your brother any worse by running over you. Good morning.” And with a bright nod she started off toward town.

The girl in the pony-carriage leaned out and looked after her longingly, then she said:

“Go on, Toddlekins, go on,” and the brown pony, at the sound of his mistress’s voice, pricked up his ears, and trotted leisurely on his way.

“I wonder who she can be,” thought Sue, her cheeks still burning as she walked, soberly enough now, toward town. “What a dear, dear girl she is! But that boy sick! nervous! Nonsense! he’s a crosspatch! Would n’t I love to take him down a peg or two! Native! Pepperpot! If I’m pepper, he’s tabasco! But who can they be? I wonder—oh, I wonder, if she could be my parsley-girl! But then any one can see that she does n’t belong around here, so she could n’t have been. But, oh, if she only were! There was something in the way she held her head and moved and smiled and spoke—what was it? I can’t tell; but it was just as if she were used to things, and as if you could n’t make her sputter no difference what you called her. If that is being ladylike it would be worth while. Oh dear, why can’t I be like other girls?”

CHAPTER IV

THE PARSLEY-GIRL

“**Y**OUR wigwam’s perfectly lovely!” exclaimed Fanny Spencer, making room on the gay divan for Belle Wilkin and Mildred Warner.

“Gorgeous,” cried Avis Taylor, dropping among the scarlet pillows in the window seat beside Pink Morris; “and oh, Sue, you just belong to it, with that dark, proud face of yours.”

“I have never heard of a curly-haired, turn-up-nosed Indian in my life, Avis,” laughed Sue, as she gave Martha Cutting the only chair and seated herself upon the floor. “But for all that I wish I had been born one. Anyway I shall be as near one as I can. I’ve changed my name to S—i—o—u—x, and I shall have it on my calling cards. Won’t that be stunning? If you write to me, don’t forget to address me so. My! what a glorious life it must be!—ponies, tepees, beadwork, and all that, you know,” she ended a little vaguely. “I should

just love tearing along over the prairie on an unbroken mustang, chasing a buffalo, or a cowboy, or something."

The girls of Monroe had fallen in love with Sue at first sight. She was so care-free, so pretty and enthusiastic, so jolly and good-natured, that they had lost their hearts to her completely. Her slang, her impetuosity, her very audacity, had made her only the more attractive to these girls, who had lived all their quiet lives in a sleepy old town. It was with the greatest pleasure they had accepted Sue's invitation to spend the afternoon with her at Cherryfair and see for the first time her wigwam, and it was with dismay they had found Martha Cutting was included in the invitation, although Sue had never met her, for Martha had just returned from Dexter.

"She'll just spoil everything," grumbled Fanny Spencer as she and Pink Morris, perched up in her leafy study in the old sweeting tree, toiled over their geometry. "She will put on her high and mighty air and measure Sue with her little foot-rule, just as she does everybody else. When I was a little thing I always hated to have Martha see my Christmas presents, for by the time she got through with them you could n't see them with a microscope. She

"I'VE CHANGED MY NAME TO S-I-O-U-X."



dwarfs everything she looks at. She goes through the world looking through the wrong end of the opera-glass; and, what's worse, she makes you look through it, too."

"You mean she looks through the wrong end at your possessions. I've always noticed that anything concerning herself looms up full size," laughed Pink. "Well, it will take more than her opera-glasses to dwarf Sue Roberts. But, all the same, I wish Sue hadn't asked her."

Sue found herself wishing so, too, though she could n't quite tell why, for the pretty little blonde, with the big blue eyes and roseleaf complexion had been almost gushing in her greeting. But, someway, Sue wished, before many minutes were over, that she had n't put on the little beaded moccasins, nor let her hair hang down in two long braids, nor worn her scarlet duck suit with the many strings of beads around her neck. When she had dressed herself so gaily, she had only felt the fun of it all to her very finger-tips and she knew how the girls would enjoy it, too. She was Pocahontas, Minnehaha, or Sunny Eye, and had danced about on her tiptoes, and given war whoops, until Mandy Dobbin had picked her up in her strong arms and carried her out of

her kitchen, saying she made her laugh so that she would never get her work done in the wide world if she did n't take herself and her nonsense out of her sight. But now, in spite of the other girls' enthusiastic praise, when Martha's round eyes fell upon her, she felt she was only a very silly girl, in a very silly masquerade, and she wished with all her heart she had worn her white shirt-waist suit and her hair in a club.

"It must be lovely to live in the wilds like that," sighed Mildred, tossing her hat on the floor and settling herself more comfortably. "I never saw an Indian in my life, but they sound awfully romantic."

"I saw several once at Dexter," said Martha Cutting. "There was nothing remarkable about them, except they were marvelously dirty."

"Well, Sue don't mean that kind," interposed Belle. "Those were partly civilized. She meant the real, true, noble red man. The sort that is all dignity and war paint, the kind you read about in poetry."

"I did n't know," went on Martha, "that the squaws ever hunted buffalo; I thought they did all the work, and hoed the corn."

"What an awful set of Indians you must

have known, Miss Cutting," protested Sue, good-naturedly. "Now, mine are all courage and romance. You may be right and I wrong, since, like Mildred, I never saw one, but I like my imaginary ones better than your real ones."

"Yes, indeed; we all do," said Avis. "Just think of Hiawatha! The blanket on this divan is too beautiful to sit on, Sue, I'd hang it on the wall for a picture. What a dear your aunt was to send all these pretty things to you."

"Was n't she a regular bird," said Sue, enthusiastically. "Aunt Serena always was a peacherina of an aunty, anyway."

At this luckless speech Fanny flushed, for she saw Martha slightly raise her eyebrows, though her smile never changed. She was already passing judgment—there could be no doubt of that—and for the first time Sue's picturesque language grated on Fan's ear. If Sue only would n't!

"Oh, dear," thought Fan; "I'm beginning to look through Martha's opera-glass, and I just won't!"

But Sue's personality was beginning to tell upon her critical guest. One could n't criticise all the time a girl who knew how to be so charming to her friends and who was so good to look at. The cool breeze came stealing through the

window to lift the little curls that had escaped about Sue's piquant face, her eyes sparkled, her cheeks flushed as she laughed and chatted, and Martha, in spite of herself, was swept along in the gay rush of Sue's good fellowship.

It was while she was serving the sandwiches and iced tea that Mandy had just brought up that Sue related her astonishing adventure with the pony-carriage.

"Of course, I looked like a perfect idiot," she said, as she finished her tale—she had withheld the rude word "native" lest it hurt her guests. "But that boy was simply horrid, while she was the most charming girl! Now does anybody know who they were?"

"Why, certainly," they all cried at once. "It was Virginia Clayton and her brother Thad!"

"And you are a lucky girl," laughed Pink, "that they deigned to speak at all. It's a wonder they did n't run right over you with a haughty smile. They are the Claytons, with the biggest kind of a C. Martha is the only one of us who has ever met them."

"But who are they?" asked Sue, bewildered, not knowing how much was Pink's mischief and how much truth. "I've never heard a soul

mention them. The girl is a perfect dear, and not in the least stuck up."

"Well, you see," explained Martha, "they are the children of Dr. Howard Clayton, the scientist. They are very rich, their home is in New York, and they come out here to Kinikinick, their beautiful country home, for a month or so every spring. This year Thad was very ill, so they have been here all summer. Mrs. Marshall, their aunt, lives here most of the time; and as my aunt in Dexter was an old school friend of hers, I went there with her to call. Mrs. Clayton is dead, and there are only the two children."

"Is n't Miss Clayton the loveliest girl!" broke in Sue. "I loved her the moment I saw her. She is so sweet and simple, and has such lots of style."

"She has been everywhere, and had so many opportunities," interposed Avis, "but she is n't half so pretty as you are, Sue."

"Thank you," laughed Sue, with a sweeping bow. "But don't make me biggity for I can't really hold a candle to her."

"She is exquisitely refined and ladylike," remarked Martha, pointedly. "I can't imagine her using a word of slang." Sue flushed, but Martha went on calmly: "Yet I don't really

care for her. She is as cold as ice, and she has n't a spark of fun in her; but her brother—he is very clever, and his father's idol—was lovely to me."

"Why, Martha Cutting!" returned Belle Wilkin, helping herself to another sandwich. "Everybody says he's so cross. Look how he behaved to Sue! And he is a regular tyrant to Virginia—you told me so yourself."

"To his sister, perhaps," replied Martha, glancing out coyly from under her long lashes, and shrugging her shoulders. "But to me he was charming. He took me to see the rose garden, and the greenhouses, and said he was so sorry he was not strong enough for a game of tennis."

"Mortal good thing for you, was n't it, Mattie?" chuckled Pink, wickedly. "You hardly know a racket from the net, do you?" For Martha hated games, and hated still more to be called "Mattie."

Sue, feeling there was something wrong with the atmosphere, sprang to her feet and made a sudden dive into her closet. "Oh, girls," she cried. "I've got something here I want to show you. If any one of you can identify it or prove property, she shall have—well, my prettiest pair of baby moccasins. Now don't all

speak at once," and Sue emerged with the pink sunbonnet perched on her head.

"Why, Martha Cutting," ejaculated Avis. "It is exactly like that blue one of yours. It is—why, of course, it is, Virginia Clayton's golf-bonnet that you copied. Sue Roberts, where did you get it?"

"It certainly is like the one Miss Clayton wore the day I was at Kinikinnick," admitted Martha reluctantly.

"Then," gasped Sue—"Oh, girls, then Virginia Clayton is my parsley-girl! Would n't that jar you!"

"Nonsense, Sue Roberts, nonsense!" expostulated Fan and Belle.

"Why, Sue, you don't understand," protested Avis. "She is the most uppish girl you ever heard of. When we all went out to call on her, Mrs. Marshall asked that we excuse her as she was engaged, if you please. Why she never has a thing to do with us."

"Parsley-girl!" inquired Martha, in bewilderment. "Virginia Clayton a parsley-girl!"

"Do tell her all about it, Sue, and where *did* you get the bonnet!" begged Pink.

Then Sue told again the whole story of the pretty greetings at their first home-coming to Cherryfair, and then of the second visit, the

finding of the bonnet, and of the girl who had waved her hand to Peggy as she climbed the fence.

“Here is the bonnet and here are the verses,” and Sue opened the drawer to her desk. “They are on plain white cards, you see, there is nothing to identify her.”

“The fence is just this side of the maple grove,” mused Fan. “It is only—but then it is perfectly impossible to believe a girl like Virginia Clayton would do any thing as—friendly and dear and human—and yet—”

“And yet, Fan, we don’t know a thing about her, really,” argued Avis. “We just have each thought things and said them until we really believe them, and all the time she may be a darling of a girl. What do you think, Martha?”

“It is utterly impossible,” replied Martha decidedly. “The bonnet does look like Miss Clayton’s. But what of that, hundreds of girls have pink sunbonnets. We don’t any of us know her handwriting, and all we do know is that a girl climbed a fence toward Kinikinnick. She never has taken any interest in our church. And how would she know Miss Roberts’s name and the names of her sisters, and about the scarlet apron and the black eyes, and how could she have gotten all that stuff here from Kini-

kinnick, a quarter of a mile away? Why, it is perfectly ridiculous! It may have been Nan Blogget, or Cynthia Hall, they live in the same direction."

"That is so likely!" scoffed Pink. "Imagine Nan Blogget with a bonnet like that, or Cynthia Hall writing verses. Guess again, Martha. Wasn't it Bridget O'Harah, or old Farmer Dent?"

"Don't be absurd, Pink," returned Martha, haughtily. "You know you yourself don't believe Virginia Clayton has been spying around here."

"Spying!" retorted Sue, hotly. "Spying! Why it was lovely kindness that she did! Why do you call that spying? I'm not a detective, or I should have found her long ago; but I firmly believe that when I do find my parsley-girl, it will be at Kinikinnick."

"And I am just as certain that you will not," declared Martha, stubbornly. She had been very proud of the fact that she alone of the Monroe girls knew the Claytons, and she had no desire to share the honor.

It was at this moment Mandy threw open the door and said in a shrill whisper:

"Here is another young lady, Miss Sue, an' I brought her right up. I guess you will be

needin' some more sandwidges, too, so you better give me the plate an' I'll git 'em."

And there, just behind Mandy, with cheeks flushed, her dark eyes on Sue, stood Virginia Clayton.

"I am so sorry—so very sorry," faltered Virginia. "I did not dream, from what the maid said, you were having a party."

"I'm not," exclaimed Sue, her eyes sparkling with pleasure, as she went eagerly forward with both hands outstretched. "I'm just having a little afternoon with my friends, and I can't tell you how glad I am that Mandy brought you right up. We were just this moment talking of you—at least I was," she added with a merry laugh. "I was protesting—but there you came just in the nick of time to claim—" and Sue snatched up the little pink bonnet.

"My golf-bonnet!" finished Virginia, smilingly, her face all rosy with blushes.

"Then you are—you are my parsley-girl! I never can tell you—but there, I shan't try! Please, may I kiss you?"

"Indeed you may," laughed Virginia, running straight into Sue's outstretched arms; "but what will your friends think of me?"

"Oh, they all know how I have been pining

for my parsley-girl. And now you must allow me to introduce you. I think you have met Miss Cutting."

And before Virginia quite understood it all, she was sitting between Pink and Avis, sipping her tea, and feeling herself delightfully at home.

Fanny was stifling with laughter at the sight of Martha's face. So this was the block of ice, the haughty aristocrat—this bright-faced laughing girl! Of course, she was a bit shy at first, but Sue knew what she was about when she put her between Pink and Avis—Pink, brimming over with fun, and kindly, gentle Avis, whose tongue, like Tennyson's brook, ran on forever.

"Please may n't we know?" she was begging now of Virginia. "How did you find out those things about Sue? How did you think of it all? It was just lovely of you! I really believe Sue cared more for her pot of parsley than for a whole hothouse full of orchids."

"Of course I did," declared Sue, stoutly. "It was like a friendly hand held out that day, and I loved every green leaf of it; and now that I have really found my parsley-girl—well, I'm not going to let her go again in a hurry." Virginia turned a smiling face toward her, but somehow, Sue imagined there were tears in

the dark eyes; so she hastened to add, "But not one of you are to know how it all happened. It is to be always a secret."

"It is going to be such a secret," said Virginia playfully "that perhaps I'll take it back to Staten Island with me and never tell a soul."

"How lovely it must be to live on an island," broke in Fanny, feeling for some reason Virginia would rather have the subject changed. "And to see the ocean!"

"It is," replied Virginia, simply. "Of course, I think there never was so beautiful a spot as my hilly island. The Kill von Kull enters the bay just in front of our house, and you can always see the lights of New York and the Jersey shore shining like jewels against the evening sky; and there are vessels passing all day long, from great square riggers, to tiny craft with one wee sail that look like toys as they float past. Oh, it is ideal in the summer; but when winter comes—ugh! how the wind howls across the bay!"

"Oh dear," sighed Mildred. "Just think of living in such a fairyland as that, and then being buried here!"

"Not at all," protested Virginia, earnestly. "Ohio is beautiful, too. I always think when I come back to Kinikinnick that it has its own

particular charm, and Aunt Sibyl likes Ohio much better than New York. I want to tell you," she went on, flushing, "how sorry I was that I could not see you the day you called; but Thad, my brother, was very restless and nervous—he has been so ill—and—and—he would not let me leave him. But I am going to return your calls very soon, as he is much better. This is the first afternoon I have been away from him, and now that I know you I hope you will all come to see me often."

"Indeed we shall," said Avis, "and I know we shall all have lovely times together this summer. Though I don't quite know if Sue will care to lend you."

"Oh, you may have her once in a while if you are very good," laughed Sue. "I hope your brother is growing stronger."

"Oh, yes, thank you," replied Virginia, gratefully. "It is nice of you to ask after him when he was so dreadful the other day. But I know you will like him so much when you are really acquainted. He is so irritable now, because he has had to give up study and all hope of entering college next year. The doctor had just told him that morning that he must not think of it, and so he was struggling with his great disappointment."

“I am so sorry,” said Sue, remorsefully; “I would n’t have been so cross to him for anything if I had known that. I felt, when we were standing in the road, glaring at each other you ought to have cried ‘sic ’em Prince!’ I’m ashamed of myself.”

“You don’t need to be,” laughed Virginia. “That battle did him a world of good. He was so angry that he quite forgot his disappointment for a while, and he commissioned me to say he hoped you would come over soon and give him another round, as he had been in better spirits ever since.”

“Tell him I will come often if that will do him any good, and be a real Susan Pepperpot, too.”

“Just as if you were n’t always that!” commented Fanny, “But, Sue Roberts!” she exclaimed, as she looked at her watch, “why did n’t you send us home? It is after five o’clock.”

Sue and Virginia stood in the old gateway and waved good-by to the gay bevy of girls, all in a flurry of white and pink and green, like so many butterflies, as they fluttered a last farewell from the turn of the lane.

“They are such nice girls,” commented Sue, as with their arms around each other the two

girls strolled down toward the orchard wall. "I've only known them a little while, but I just love them. I believe we are going to have a swell time this summer. There are n't many boys here, but I like that. I would n't give a penny for a boy who was n't my brother, or somebody else's brother, would you?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Virginia, demurely, with a twinkle in her black eyes. "I've known some only sons that were n't so bad."

"Virginia Clayton, you know perfectly what I mean," rebuked Sue, giving Virginia a loving pinch. "I like boys in their place. Nice, teasing, boyish boys, without any frills and quirks—a boy who'd say, 'Hello, Sue, going my way?' You, know that kind I'm sure."

"I do, I do," laughed Virginia. "But I guess you and I have n't gotten to the frill-and-quirk stage. Just now we are too busy getting used to our hair being clubbed and to the length of our skirts. I don't believe Miss Cutting minds getting grown up. She seems so much more—young-ladyfied than the rest. Don't you think so?"

Sue made a little grimace, and then laughed.

"There, Virginia Clayton, you were reading my mind, and I had meant to be so wise and tactful, and not say a word about a 'just de-

parted guest.' Aunt Serena is always telling me that is such bad form. Ugh! don't you hate form, anyway? But to go back to the cow-pasture—that's dreadful slang; please forget I said it—Miss Cutting makes me weary. She is six months younger than Fan Spencer, and a whole year younger than Belle, but she just loves to appear blasé and passé and a lot of Frenchy things. Fan and Belle play tennis, and go driving, and for walks with the boys, and Pink and Avis go to parties with them, and that's all right, for they are sixteen—Mildred is just my age—but they are nice and sensible about it. Mildred is apt to get a bit sentimental, but Pink takes her down a peg or two, and so they even up nicely. But Martha Cutting—why, Virginia, she's got a train to her evening dress, and wears her hair on the top of her head, and says 'gentlemen' when she means boys in knickerbockers. Bah!"

"She is very pretty. I don't believe I ever saw a more beautiful complexion and her hair is like gold. Aunty says she plays and sings very well."

"I know," said Sue remorsefully, "and she can sew, and paint, and do lots of things I can't do at all; but someway, she rubs me the wrong way. Oh Virginia, I wish you did n't



"YOU SEE, I WANTED IT TO BE JUST A SECRET BETWEEN US TWO."

have to go home!" They had reached the wall, and Virginia stood swinging her parasol daintily by the handle, with her fluffy white skirts gathered up about her preparatory to climbing the stile.

"You haven't told me a word of how you knew about me, and, of course, I'm dying to know. I did n't want you to tell me before the girls, for I felt—well—" and Sue stooped to tuck in a stray lock of dusky hair under Virginia's big white hat—"you see, I wanted it to be just a sweet little secret between us two."

"I am going to come over with Toddlekins for you to-morrow afternoon," said Virginia lovingly, "and if you will go, we will take a long drive, and I'll tell you all about it."

So it was settled, and Sue sat on the wall and watched the little, slender figure in its white gown and poppy-wreathed hat until it disappeared in the distance.

"My parsley-girl is every thing I would have her," said Sue to herself, as she climbed down off the wall in answer to Mandy's vigorous calling. "She's good and bright and jolly and pretty and stylish and . . . and . . . a lady. Yes, Sue, my dear, that's it . . . a real, true lady. I wonder what she thought of me."

CHAPTER V

VIRGINIA

AS Virginia seated herself in the wicker phaëton, preening herself like a bird, and shaking out the dainty frills of her pale-green dimity, Mrs. Marshall, from the veranda, thought she had never seen her niece look so pretty. The dusky little face, under the big green hat with its wreath of hops, was all aglow with happiness. The dark eyes had for once lost their sadness, the soft red lips curled up instead of down, as lonely Virginia's lips were apt to do, and she was really lovely in her youth and joy.

"If you could only look like that all the time, sweetheart," called Aunt Sibyl from the steps. "I would n't need any other sunshine."

"Very well, Aunty. I'll be all shine now I have found Sue," Virginia laughed back, taking out her whip, which, with its scarlet bow, was only used for that touch of color matching the pony's topknot, since Toddlekins had never

felt the touch of its lash. "Just wait until you meet Sue, Aunt Sibyl, and you will love her as much as I do, she is such a dear girl."

"Give Miss Susan Pepperpot my compliments," chuckled Thad, looking up from his book as he lay in the hammock. "Say, Virginia, bring her back to dinner. She is a hundred times more fun than that Cutting girl. Phew! did n't Sue sputter that day!"

"Sue does n't like boys," remarked Virginia, demurely, gathering up the lines. "At least not boys with frills and quirks!" as she drove briskly down the road.

"Now, what did she mean by that, Aunt Sibyl?" grumbled Thad, as Mrs. Marshall waved Virginia a last farewell and turned a smiling face toward the tall, pale boy who lounged in the hammock. "Did she mean Miss Pepperpot did n't like me, or was it that I had frills and quirks? What are they anyway? Somehow I don't like the sound of them. Now was n't it just like Nixie to give me that parting shot and then drive off where I can't get at her!"

"Well, Thad, my dear," laughed Mrs. Marshall, laying a gentle hand on the boy's head, "I've seen you when you had more frills and

quirks—for I think I know what Sue means—than I like to see. That day with Miss Cutting, for instance.”

“Oh, I just did that to tease Nixie, Aunt Sibyl. I saw she could n’t endure the girl, she was so stiffly sweet to her. Girls are always like that; the less they like you, the more polite they grow. Nixie acted as if she had stepped out of a book on etiquette and frozen stiff; and as she had had one of her tantrums that morning and sailed out of the room with her head in the air because she thought I was rude to her, I took it out on her.”

“I am afraid you take a good many things out on Virginia,” sighed Mrs. Marshall. “You are a great deal like Longfellow’s little girl, Thad, when you are good you are very, very good, and when you are bad you are horrid, and since you have been ill it is mostly horrid, and it seems to always fall on Virginia.”

“I’m a beast!” muttered Thad, shielding his eyes with his hand. “She’s a mighty good sister, but she is so awfully haughty under discipline it tempts one. If she would just sail in and give me a round or two, instead of walking off as if she were on stilts, we’d get on better. Sort of clear the atmosphere, you see. She has stood by me like a brick through this

row, though. Don't know how I'd have weathered it without her."

"Have you told her so?" inquired his aunt, seating herself and drawing her work basket toward her.

"Well, no; not in so many words. You see, Aunty, Nixie is n't like you. Now I could go to you any time and say, 'Aunt Sibyl, I've behaved like a cad instead of the gentleman you have a right to expect me to be. Please shake and let's forgive and forget;' and you would say, 'It's all forgotten,' cried the boy, and gave his hand with honest joy,' and that would be the end of it. But Virginia, she is n't of the forgetting sort, and the next time I'd fall from my perch, she would look at me coldly as much as to say, 'remember, Thad,' and then I would remember, just what I did n't want to, and feel like kicking myself for apologizing. Nixie is the dearest girl in the world, but she has n't the slightest tact in managing a man."

"A boy, you mean, Thad; a man would n't care for a thing like that. He would think 'I owed my sister an apology, and if she is unfortunate in her way of taking it, that has nothing to do with my duty.' See, Thaddeus, my son?"

"I guess you are right," laughed Thad,

reaching out to give Mrs. Marshall's hand a loving pat. "Anyway you are a mighty nice Aunty and never ruffle feathers. Yes, I know what you want me to say, by that queer wise smile. I'll try," and Thad turned again to his reading.

To Virginia, as she rolled down the long, shady road, it seemed the world had never been more beautiful.

Over to the right, the Tuscarawas river, all shimmer and shine, was wandering in and out, among the meadows; and beside it, following every curve and bend, lay the canal with only the grassy towpath between. The willows growing on the river's edge leaned far out and gazed like Narcissus, at their beauty, in the gleaming water, and upon the surface of the canal the water lilies nestled among broad leaves. Goshen Hill lifted itself straight and precipitous, crowned by giant oaks and hickories, wrapped about with blackberry bushes and hazel brush, while at its feet the wild roses hurried away around the bend in a sweep of bloom that turned the wayside pink and filled the world with fragrance.

Virginia Clayton had never found it very easy to form friendships. "Little Miss Disdain," one of her schoolmates had dubbed her,

and the name had clung in spite of its unfitness, for Virginia was really never disdainful; she was longing for companionship, but her natural diffidence made it hard for her to go halfway, and the difficulty she had to forgive and forget caused her to cover her hurts with that which she intended for dignity, but what those about her were apt to consider scorn.

Virginia's mother had been her closest friend, and the relation between them had been so loving and sweet that the child's heart was almost broken when, two years before, she had lost her. Dr. Clayton was a dreamy, scholarly man, whose mind was absorbed by his work and research; and when Thad, impulsive, teasing Thad, had suddenly proved himself in the academy contest to be a scientist of no mean parts, his delight had been so great that his heart had been since set upon his promising boy, and Virginia, his quiet little daughter, seemed almost forgotten in the lonely old house. Even Mrs. Marshall understood the outspoken nephew far better than she did the reserved, uncomplaining little Virginia, and though she loved her fondly, and lectured Thad for his thoughtlessness to his sister, had never yet found her own way entirely into the girl's lonely heart.

Virginia had the greatest admiration for her brother, and half her heartache came from the feeling that he misunderstood her. She longed to tell him of her pride in him, of her belief in what he would do and be; but no matter how carefully she had prepared her little set speech, her tongue always failed her at the auspicious moment—which perhaps was as well, for Master Thad was getting quite as much praise as was good for him. It had piqued him more than he would have confessed, that no difference what prize he brought home Virginia had never said more than the merest “I’m glad, Thad.” How should he know that she flew up to her room to cry for joy, and that she saved every program, every printed word about him—yes—and treasured the prize long after he had forgotten its existence? For Thad, being his father’s son, had no time for more than capture, he was too intent upon the chase.

When Thad Clayton had suddenly broken down from overstudy, it had been a heavy blow to all of them. Dr. Clayton felt he had perhaps urged his brilliant boy on faster than had been right, mistaking eager enthusiasm for strength. To Thad, failure at the beginning of his college career was almost more than he could bear, and finding himself thwarted for

the first time in his life he accepted his defeat with very bad grace indeed. It was Virginia who had stepped into the breach and taken upon herself all she could of her father's sorrow and her brother's ill-temper. When the doctor told them that Thad must at once be gotten away from the water, it was Virginia who decided they would better spend the whole summer at Kinikinnick, instead of the month or two as was usual, though the summer by the sea was her delight. It was she who had comforted her father, and sent him back to his laboratory as soon as Thad was better, and it was she who had undertaken her brother's amusement during his convalescence; and if she was not at all times strong enough to keep from having tantrums, as Thad called her attacks of hurt dignity, she was at least trying with all her might to be "good," and her brother recognized the fact.

As Toddlekins trotted up the lane to Cherry-fair, there arose such shrieks of merry greeting that the little fellow stopped still in the middle of the road, shaking his beribboned head and pawing the ground with an impatient forefoot refusing to move even at the cracking of the gay whip.

Davie and Ben sat astride the big balls of

the gate-posts, Phil, silent, but happy, was hidden safely among the leafy branches of his favorite tree; Peggy stationed on the veranda, danced up and down, crying: "Here she comes, Sue; here she comes," and only Betty, the proper, sat quiet and demure, swinging herself daintily in the hammock, her white skirts spread out, her flushed face bent over a book, not a leaf of which had been turned in the last half-hour.

"Is Sue ready?" called Virginia, gaily. "If she is n't, here is a pony that would like to give two little boys a drive down the lane and back again."

Davie and Ben stayed not upon the order of their going but went at once. Like small cyclones they "shinned" down the gate-posts and flung themselves bodily upon Virginia and Toddlekens.

"Oh, you did n't mean it!" gasped Davie, looking up into Virginia's face, his blue eyes fairly limpid with longing, the left one turned in a bit, giving a most bewitching twist to his glance that had served the rogue many a good turn. "Sue's ready. She has been ready since daylight, I guess. But we did n't none of us ever ride with a pony in our born days; an' Ben, he's only a little chap, an' it would be aw-



Miss C. L. S. Pease

BETTY, THE PROPER, SAT QUIET AND DEMURE.

ful nice for him, but I guess you better let me drive. I'm 'most eight."

Bennie, having climbed in after hugging Toddlekins' shaggy head and kissing his velvety nose, had reached for the lines, and there was a quiver of his lower lip as Davie made his modest request.

"I'll tell you," laughed Virginia, "you drive down the lane, and Bennie up, and Phil is to walk at Toddlekins' head to see that he behaves himself and turns all right, while I have a little chat with Betty and Peggy. Hurry up, please, for I must not keep Sue waiting."

Betty, beaming with pleasure, drew her stiff little skirts aside to make a place for Virginia. The child, happy in the glimpse of her sister's friend, a girl with a real pony-carriage, had gotten herself up "regardless," as Sue said. The ruby ring blazed on her forefinger which was stuck out straight, as if to emphasize any remark she might make. She had traded dish-washings with Peggy for the privilege of wearing the gold beads; a pair of old white boots, a size too small, cramped her feet, and her blonde hair, from being done up in rag knobs all night—fluffed out in the manner of the side-show Circassian lady.

"You'd hardly know it was Betty," com-

plained Peggy to Sue when she caught her first glimpse of her twin; for Betty had locked herself up and accomplished her toilet alone. "I think you are lots prettier with your hair in braids and with shoes you can straighten your feet in, Betty. You walk just like a hen! Virginia will think you 're a silly! Won't she, Sue?"

"No, she won't," replied Sue, confidently, as she fluffed her pompadour before the misty old looking glass. "She was a little girl herself once, and knows just how it feels to want to look lovely and not know how. You haven't got there yet, Peggy; for you are two years behind Betty in feelings, if you are twins. I had an awful case of it myself a year or two ago. Betty looks like a guy, but never mind, she's happy. Oh, Peggy, do bring me the ink 'til I black the white thread I mended my glove with, the stitches gap 'til they look like teeth grinning at you!"

As Sue, followed by Peggy, came down the steps toward the big maples where Virginia and Betty swung in the shade, Virginia thought she had never seen a girl so vibrant with life, so joyous, so buoyant as Sue.

"You look lovely sitting there among all those cool, green ruffles and under that big

green hat!" Sue exclaimed, "like a dear bud, that is going to burst into a flower right away. Oh, I am so happy we are going! I never rode in a pony-carriage before. This is Peggy, my other little sister; I see you know Betty and the boys. It is just lovely of you to let them take the pony; they'll never forget it. Someway, we are always having the most beautiful things happen to us! Now here are Cherry-fair, and the flock, and Mandy, and, best of all—you. Why, do you know, I could n't sleep last night planning all the nice times we'll have. I was so remorseful over your brother! I shall make him some of my very best fudge, and we'll have picnics, and oh, every thing!"

Virginia felt that in some sweet way she belonged to every one of them; to the three happy, shouting boys who were now coming scampering up the lane; to the twins—Betty with her absurd finery, but whose loving little hand was tucked in hers, to Peggy, whose round face was all aglow with admiration—and to Sue—dear Sue—who was offering her simple hospitality, her friendship, her family, her good cheer, with such a prodigal hand. Dear Sue, who was so pretty and fascinating in her simple white suit and her sailor hat!

"And now I want you to come in and meet

Masie, please,” went on Sue. “You will find her the dearest of mothers, and you shall have a share of her and of father, too.”

“And a share in the pig, too,” whispered Bennie, who, afraid something might happen without his seeing or hearing, had torn himself away from Toddlekins and was now snuggling himself in between Virginia and Sue, as they turned toward the house, the twins having gone for their little drive.

“I never heard of such generosity,” laughed Virginia with a choke in her voice. “You don’t know how happy it makes me. Do you really mean you won’t mind sharing with me, and will let me belong and come inside your happiness?”

“Indeed, indeed, we’ll love it,” cried Sue, giving Virginia an ecstatic little squeeze in which Bennie quite disappeared.

“Masie, here is Virginia Clayton, my parsley-girl; and, please, I have promised her a share in you, because—well, I’m sure every girl needs mothering.”

Then Virginia felt herself taken into loving arms, and a sweet face, all motherliness, looked into hers, as a soft voice said: “My child, if mothering is what you need, you can’t come too

often nor stay too long. Indeed, you shall have your place in my little flock.”

“I don’t believe there ever was such a family before,” whispered Virginia, clinging close. “You are all so good and kind.”

“Who began it?” asked Mrs. Roberts, softly kissing the little brown face. “Who set sweet messages all about the house, and thought of the comfort and pleasure of the stranger within her gates? Just tell me that, please; and always be sure, dear, that we need you quite as much as you need us, and if I can give you any comfort for the loss of your dear mother, I shall be so glad and happy; so come often, Virginia.”

CHAPTER VI

THE DRIVE

“GOOD-BY! good-by!” called the children, swarming in the old gateway. “Good-by! good-by!” cried Sue and Virginia, and away scampered Toddlekins down the lane.

“That,” laughed Sue, poking with the tip of her parasol a fat little package that Mandy had run out to tuck in the phaëton at the last moment, “is ‘sandwidges,’ as Mandy calls them, she whispered to me she just knew we’d get ‘faint for a bite.’ So, now that there is no danger of us dying of hunger on this trip, let’s have the time of our lives.”

Down through the valley, up over the hills, through woodland roads, across bridges, by country lanes and shady dells, they jogged, and over them the blue sky, about them the summer greenery, and in their hearts the joys of girlhood.

It was delightful to hear of so many joyful happenings as Sue had to tell about. It seemed, to listen to her, that the Robertses had

been the most favored of mortals; and yet when you had unwrapped Sue's enthusiasm from each especial dispensation, it was apt to prove a very common everyday, little providence. But Sue knew how to get to the very core of joy, and so she chatted away, never knowing—nor would she have cared if she had known—that she was disclosing to a rich girl that she knew absolutely nothing of the ease, the luxury, the beauty with which Virginia had been surrounded all her life.

“Sue Roberts,” asked Virginia at last, when they were breathless with laughter over some absurd prank of Davie's, “did you ever have a sad hour? I never dreamed a person could be so happy. Don't you ever get blue and hate yourself? But, then, I suppose there are such a lot of you, and you all love each other so, you have no chance to grow gloomy.”

“Do I get blue? Why, bless you, yes! I get so blue sometimes I could almost sell myself for indigo. Masie says a nature like mine, with such an upside would have to have a downside, too. I'm just like a teeter-board. I go up, up, up 'til I almost touch the stars; then I go down, down, down 'til they have to dig me out of the cellar. I am mostly up now, but it took a long time for Masie to get me to a little

more of a level, and sometimes I come down now with an awful thump. But, you see, God has been so good to us I would be a most ungrateful wretch to be blue often."

"Sue," began Virginia again. It was so hard for her to talk out of her heart, and yet she longed for Sue to know and understand. "I mean, do you ever feel as if . . . as if no soul in the world appreciates you . . . as if you would like to creep away and never try any longer . . . and as if your heart were an old, cold stone and didn't love anybody or want to be loved?"

"Of course, honey, lots of times. That's what Masie calls 'girlism.' She says every girl she ever knew had touches of it, and it does n't mean a thing, but that you are pretty sentimental and maybe your stomach is out of order. Masie says there is only one sure cure for it and that's to go and do something kind for somebody else, quick. But sometimes I forget about the cure and am dreadful. Gracious, Virginia, I've gone and shut myself up in a closet, and cried my eyes 'most out over not one blessed thing, when I had really thrashed it all out. At the time it looked as big as Goshen Hill. Betty has severe attacks, but so far Peggy does n't know she's a heart to

ache—but she will. Goodness! yes, that's part of the joy of being a girl, for, honest, Virginia, one *does* get a sort of satisfaction out of it. It feels so painfully nice to think you are the only one in the world that is so abused or has n't a single friend, when, all the time, you know deep down in yourself, there are lots that just dote on you. Don't ask me to explain; it's just girl, and you have got to let it go at that."

"Oh, Sue!" and Virginia laughed ruefully in spite of herself. "I think you are the dearest girl that ever lived. I never dared ask any one before. I suppose if I had mama, she would have explained, just like your Masie, and have made it funny to me. But I did n't suppose other girls knew about it—not happy girls, with mothers."

Sue's arm stole around Virginia, and the laughing face changed in an instant.

"That's different—the mother-sickness. I know that must be so hard, the greatest of all sorrows; but I meant the not being appreciated and the hating one's self. When I'm clothed and in my right mind I know I am appreciated far more than I deserve. I'm just a slam-bang girl, that troubles father so—and I won't mend skirt bindings nor keep my temper. Oh, I've got lots of reasons to hate myself; but, after

all, what's the use? Father always says the best way is to get up and go on doing better, and not to sit down and cry by the wayside, for you would never get anywhere that way. I can tell you, Virginia, it takes lots of managing to make six kids grow up into sheep instead of goats, though you might n't think so. I wonder sometimes that father and mother don't throw up the sponge."

"Sponge?" inquired Virginia, wrinkling her brow in an effort to understand. "What good would that do?"

"There," laughed Sue, half ashamed. "That is my pet sin, my slang. I mean I wonder they don't give up trying. But, Virginia, here I have been talking all this time about myself; I thought you were going to tell me how you came to be parsley-girl. I'm just dying to hear. Let's eat the 'sandwidges' while you tell about it."

When they were settled with a napkin and sandwich, and Toddlekins was brought to a walk, Virginia began:

"I suppose I ought to say, 'once upon a time,' to make it sound like a story," she laughed; "but it really did begin with my being blue and all that . . . that is the reason I asked you about it. When Thad was taken

sick in the early spring, I was at Miss Davis's school for girls in New York, and we came right out here. I had liked the girls at Miss Davis's so much, and was very lonely, and Thad . . . well, he was nervous and I am dreadfully sensitive, I know, and I could n't go to Aunt Sibyl with my woes, for she had her hands full with father, and Thad sick, and the servants and all. I don't know what I should have done if I had n't found the dearest baby! She belongs to Mrs. Dixon, whose husband takes care of Kinikinnick farm. Mrs. Dixon is such a dear, kind woman, and she let me take baby every morning for a canter down the drive on Toddlekins. Baby is just two years old, and the cunningest thing. Well, I think Mrs. Dixon saw I was lonely and blue, and she used to tell me all the gay things she could think of. She belongs to your father's church, and her sister is maid at Mr. Reed's, where your father was staying when he came to supply the pulpit in the early spring. Now can't you see how I heard about Sue, and the twins, and all the rest of you happy folks? We talked so much about you that I loved you more and more, and so did Mrs. Dixon. The day the congregation worked at the house, Mrs. Dixon was too busy to go, but she said if I would

come after tea we would walk over to Cherry-fair and she would take the lilies-of-the-valley and some jelly. I don't know what made me think of it, unless it was because you had grown so real and dear to me; but that day when I ran down to the housekeeper's room for something, I saw two pots of parsley growing in the window, and so I begged one of Mrs. Knox—she is always so good to me—and a new tea-towel; she was just hemming a lot of new ones. Then I ran to my room and dashed off those crazy verses and flew over to Mrs. Dixon. We took baby on Toddlekins and had such a pleasant time. We climbed into the kitchen window—Mrs. Dixon's sister had left it open for us—and that is all."

"But that is n't all," cried Sue, giving Virginia a rapturous hug, "it is only the beginning. How about the lunch, and the pink sun-bonnet, and my eyes, and the apron? It was like a miracle!"

"Why, it was just as simple, when you know about it," laughed Virginia. "You see that morning, when I went over to take the baby for her ride, Mrs. Dixon told me you had come, and that she was longing to take you over a nice lunch, but that her husband could not spare a horse, and it was too far to walk. Then I

asked her if I could n't take it in a hamper strapped on Toddlekins, going across the woodlot, tie him just on the other side of the maple grove and then carry the hamper the rest of the way. She was afraid that I could n't manage Toddlekins, and that the hamper would be too heavy, but I was just crazy to do something, and I suspect she thought it would do me good, and so in half an hour I was started."

"You darling! how I wish I had been along!"

"Carrying your own lunch, you greedy thing? Well, I meant to set the hamper down and run away as fast as I could; but the first thing I found was the whole family out on the veranda. I was so near I could almost have touched you. I could just hear my heart beat as I hid down behind a lilac bush; but pretty soon you went upstairs, and the plan rushed into my head, for I heard you telling your mother about putting the boards on the barrel, and it seemed so nice to be able to leave the lunch all laid for you."

"Oh, what fun," laughed Sue; "and there you were hidden away! What would you have done if we had spied you?"

"I never thought of that until afterwards, it all happened so quickly; and everything seemed to help, for you all went to the front

part of the house, and I got the luncheon ready in a trice. I had meant to leave some sort of a verse, I 'm always scribbling nonsense, so had a card along; and the black eyes and scarlet apron I had seen from my hiding-place, so everything went lovely. You would never have gotten a glimpse of me, if I had not stopped to throw in some purslane to that funny little curly-tailed pig, who was squealing like mad. I thought it was no more than fair I should give him his luncheon, too; and when I turned around I saw you children all come tumbling out of the house! Then if I did n't scamper! keeping close by the wall as long as I could. I lost my bonnet as I climbed over the stile, but I had n't time to get it, and ran on. Just as I came to the fence where Toddlekins was tied out of sight in the bushes, I looked back and there was Peggy, waving the bonnet and calling something I could n't hear. She looked so pretty standing on the stile, I could n't help waving back to her, and then I climbed over the fence, and Toddlekins and I flew home. Mrs. Dixon scolded me next morning, and said she would have been broken-hearted if you had caught me hiding there and had said something sharp to me. But I told her she did not know the Robertses yet, if she thought that; for I

knew I would have been welcomed with open arms."

"Indeed, indeed, you should have been. It is the most delightful thing I ever heard: Did n't Thad laugh when you told him?"

Virginia flushed.

"No, he did n't. I told him the day after, and he said he did n't think my father would approve of my flying about the country carrying 'cold provender.' I am awfully sensitive, and I guess that at last we quarreled, at least. I did n't speak to him all the evening. But when Aunt Sibyl asked what was the matter, she said she did n't think father would have cared at all, and that she herself thought it great fun, and if I had told her she would have gone along."

"There, that settles it!" declared Sue, vehemently. "Aunt Sibyl and I are friends, but between Thad and Susan Pepperpot there is war to the knife!"

"Nonsense! You will be the best of friends. He said I was to be sure to bring you home to dinner. I told him you did n't like boys with frills and quirks. You will find he has a good many, but he really is a dear boy, and we are very proud of him. I know he did act dreadfully that day you ran into us; but, you see, he

had been as cross as could be all morning, for, poor boy, he was battling with his weakness and his disappointment. He had felt sure they would let him go to college this fall, as he thought he was so much better. I was afraid you would never want to see me again when he was so horrid to you, and . . . and . . . I was very lonely for a girl friend.”

“Bless your heart! You have one now, and don’t you forget it. I shall stick closer than a burr. Besides, it would take more than such a little tiff as that with your brother to frighten me. My! was n’t he sarcastic! But I suppose I deserved it.”

“No, you did n’t,” protested Virginia. “It was Thad’s quick temper; but he is such a dear boy under it all.”

“Did I tell you, I am going to spell my name S-i-o-u-x after this?” said Sue, when Toddlekins was trotting up the lane toward Cherry-fair. “Masie let me order some calling cards from a little lame boy in Monroe; he writes them in a most beautiful, flourishy hand, and I never had any cards before. I never told a word of it at home, for I want to surprise them—but I told Jimmie to put on Sioux Roberts. It will be awfully striking. Don’t you think so?”

“I don’t believe I ever heard of such a thing

before," faltered Virginia, looking very puzzled. "I didn't know one ever wanted calling cards to look striking. You ought to be Miss Roberts, of Cherryfair, ought you not?"

"Pooh! that might do for Betty," scoffed Sue, airily. "I never go in for any silly old conventions. I like something individual and sort of stunning. My! I don't believe I will ever get to be Miss Roberts. I'm sure I don't feel like it now."

CHAPTER VII

RIPENING FRIENDSHIP

THE friendship between Virginia Clayton and Sue Roberts grew and strengthened through the long summer weeks. There was hardly a day passed that Sue did not go skipping across the meadow and on through the maple grove to Kinikinnick, nor Virginia come flying up the lane on Toddlekins, who vied now with the pig in the little boys' affections. Indeed, Toddlekins was the pet of everybody at Cherryfair; even Mandy Dobbin, since she had found he would eat a cruller from her hand, had given him her whole heart.

Virginia said Toddlekins never raised his feet so gingerly, nor tossed his head so coyly, as when Sue and she tucked themselves into the phaëton for one of their long drives. The girls of Monroe were always on the outlook for the gay little turnout, and many a bit of girlish gossip was exchanged across the yellow wheels. Then, too, there were the most delightful days spent at Cherryfair with all the "Jolly Octet,"

as the girls had named themselves. Then there were the dainty teas on the shady verandas of the Monroe homes, and the never-to-be-forgotten afternoons at Kinikinnick. For while Virginia was the sort of a girl that would wish to keep her dearest friend all to herself—had she allowed her own desires to rule—to Sue it was the more the merrier. To be sure, she loved the little heart to heart talks with Virginia, and the quiet drives, but she reveled in the babble of many girlish tongues, the laughter and the clatter when Pink, Fanny, Belle, Avis, Mildred and Martha were with them. Yes, even Martha; for, as Sue once laughingly confided to Thad, there was great charm to her being with Martha, in the delightful uncertainty of what would happen, for one never could tell when the match would reach the powder can. So far there had been no open rupture, owing to Martha's suavity and Sue's good humor; but the two girls' natures were as opposed as the poles and each disliked the other most heartily.

"Some day," Fan Spencer would say sagely, "some day the feathers will fly."

"And oh! And oh! May I be there to see!" chuckled Pink, whose open admiration for Sue, and teasing mischief were Martha's daily cross.

"You are a regular monkey with your tricks,

Pink Morris," she had said bitingly, one day, while they both stood at Avis Taylor's gate, Pink having been more tantalizing than usual.

"I'd rather be a monkey any time than a peacock," replied Pink, skipping off gaily down the street, leaving gentle Avis to quell the storm she knew would follow her remark.

Martha Cutting was considered, until Sue's arrival, the prettiest girl in Monroe; and she certainly was the most talented, singing and playing very well for a girl of her age. Beside this, Martha had an air of gentle refinement that was very pleasing to the quiet folk among whom she lived. Sue sang better, played as well, was prettier, because more vivacious, and she had a heart full of love and cheer for every living creature. Each girl had her friends and admirers, and if it had not been for Virginia Clayton's advent it is doubtful if there would ever have been any bitter feeling between the girlish rivals. But that Virginia Clayton—the one girl Martha should have really cared for as an intimate friend—should want Sue Roberts as a chum, that Virginia with all her charm and advantages should choose a "slangy, tom-boyish, loud, blowsy girl like that, was more than she could understand," as Martha had once ventured to say to Avis Taylor, and Avis,

that gentle, timid white pigeon of a girl, had turned upon her in a way she did not soon forget.

“Sue loud! Sue blowsy! Slangy she is, and maybe a bit of a tomboy, but she is the dearest, truest, most unselfish soul that ever lived, Martha Cutting!” Avis’ cheeks were flaming and her eyes full of tears. “It is all your wicked jealousy! Virginia chose her as Sue chose Virginia, because they were suited in their hearts. Virginia is wise enough to see under Sue’s slang all that is dear and good, and Sue—Sue, with her loving heart, knows how to get under Virginia’s reserve. We all love Sue, but you, Martha, and I advise you never to say that sort of thing to Pink or Fan, or you’ll be left out of all our good times.”

Avis’ indignation would carry her no farther and she burst into tears. Martha, girl-like, never admired Avis more than at that moment, for she really loved her dearly, and had bullied and petted her ever since they were little tots; so, cuddling her in the hammock, she wept with her in sympathy and the breach was healed, for that time at least.

But while there was much that was lovely in Sue’s life that summer, there were worries, too, and some that troubled her not a little. Betty

and Peggy were happy in their own little friendships and the reflected glory of Sue's good time, for if that young person had an especial virtue, it was her ability to be a good sister, and the twins never felt left out in the cold when the "Octet" met at Cherryfair, and, being sensible little maidens, they knew how to retire into the background upon occasions—would that Bennie had! He *could* be a cross, and Sue's eyes flashed and Bennie's fat legs flew when she discovered him stealthily picking the icing from the picnic cake, or cozily ensconced among the fresh pillows of the hammock, with his bare feet on Martha Cutting's pale blue organdy. But, after all, when Mandy Dobbins had stifled, with a ginger cooky, his squeals of outraged feelings, at being so ignominiously put out, Sue's conscience had hurt her so that she read "a mile of 'Tar-Baby,'" sang two miles of "Mr. Dooly," and "rocked clear from Cherryfair to New York that very night," as she afterwards confided to Virginia.

To Phil this was one long summer of ecstasy. In the first place, he had found in Cedric Adams a boy after his own heart. A boy who doted on the Henty books, electric batteries, and toy dynamos; a boy who knew how to read and keep still when you wanted to do the same, and

who tabooed all girls except sisters; a boy who could fish by the hour and never utter a word, but who could yell like a Comanche if the occasion demanded; a boy who would help you weed your garden, if you helped him weed his, and who was, as Sue expressed it, "Johnny-on-the-spot in every game from one-o-cat to football." Secondly, Thad Clayton, interested in the two lads from Sue's vivid description of their half silent, wholly devoted friendship, had offered them the loan of any book in his library, and had also invited the boys to come over every Saturday afternoon that he might give them a little talk on electricity with some experiments.

But Sue's worry had to do with none of this. It was father, dear, merry father, who, through all his troubles had always a joke and a smile for his little folks.

"It's no use to depress them," he would say to Masie—for his throat grew worse and worse. "Poor dears, they may have it hard enough before long." But this was only when the pain was very bad indeed; usually he would snatch up little Mrs. Roberts instead and perch her on his shoulder and carry her downstairs and out into the sunshine, to the delight of the children, and it would end in a great romp and

everybody would join hands and dance around the big bell-flower tree and sing with all their merry might:

“Whoopsy saw, sine craw,
The Robertses come to town,
With troubles a-plenty, but never a frown,
Their laughter goes up and no tears run down,
Whoopsy saw, sine craw,
When the Robertses come to town!”

which would cause good, kind Mandy to draw her hand across her eyes and say:

“They’re jest the happiest, cheerfulest, get-the-most-out-of-nothin’est lot that ever drawed breath. God bless ’em every one!”

Yet one may sing and dance when one’s heart is very heavy, and hearts were heavy at Cherry-fair, for there were money worries, too, that grew worse and worse.

But it began to look more and more as if they should have to give up Mandy Dobbins, and Mandy’s round face and cheeriness had grown very dear to them all; and, too, there began to be very grave doubts as to the possibility of Sue’s going away to school that autumn, though it had been understood for years that at fifteen she was to have her first flight out of the home nest, and it had been a very alluring prospect. It was all the harder for

her to give it up, since she knew if she stayed in Monroe her father would insist upon her entering the High School, and as is usual with minister's children who have been moved from post to pillar, she would be behind in the required studies, and so unable to enter the graduating class with the other girls.

So it was a very forlorn Sue who walked up the drive to Kinikinnick one hot August afternoon—so forlorn, indeed, that Virginia came flying down the steps to meet her with a scared face and anxious inquiry.

“‘All's quiet along the Potomac,’ ” Sue answered laughingly, returning her kiss. “‘I've got the black dog on my shoulder, that is all.’ ” Then, tempted by Virginia's unspoken sympathy and Mrs. Marshall's kind welcome, Sue did the very thing she had n't intended, and told them all about it.

“Oh, Sue,” cried Virginia, her face all aglow with gladness. “It is a real coincidence—just this morning I got a letter from father, saying Miss Davis will not open her school this year, and that I can make my own choice and go wherever I please; for he has decided to take Thad to South America for the winter, and I'd be a good deal in the way on a trip like that. Oh, please, Sue, let's take the money it would

cost for a fashionable school in New York, and both of us go to some nice cheaper school out here in Ohio. Then we could come home for Christmas—for father and Thad won't be back before next June—and we could have a beautiful time together. Would n't that be fine, Aunt Sibyl?"

"I think that is a very good idea, Virginia," answered Mrs. Marshall, who had grown very fond of Sue, and believed the friendship was doing both girls much good. "I'm sure your father would be perfectly willing. Do you think, Sue, your father and mother would consent?"

"I am sure I don't know," replied Sue, simply. "It is as sweet and dear of Virginia as can be, but whether father and mother consented or not, I could n't do it. I can't explain, but there is a feeling that would n't let me. Please understand, I am so grateful."

"But I don't want your gratitude, Sue," begged Virginia. "It would only be being good to me, and I don't understand a bit. Why, Sue, it is n't like you when we are such chums. Have n't we promised to be friends forever and ever, and name our oldest daughters after each other, and be buried in the same graveyard?"

Yet nothing would move Sue, neither Vir-

ginia's passionate pleading, Mrs. Marshall's persuasion, nor even Thad's teasing when he came upon the scene—there was what Virginia called a great fighting friendship between Thad and Sue, for they had quarreled on almost every known subject—but even Thad failed to change her resistance.

“She don't want to be seen with you, Virginia,” teased Thad. “She's ashamed of your Staten Island style. She does n't like you because you have lost your R's. Isn't that it, Susie?”

“No it is n't, Thad Clayton,” retorted Sue, half amused, half angry. “I think there is no girl on earth like Virginia, and I would be so happy I'd dance from here to Jericho to go to school with her, but I'm afraid it would spoil our lovely friendship to accept such a favor. And then for her to give up her fine school and go to some dinky little place with me! Oh, I can't accept it! I can't! I can't!”

“But Sue,” said Virginia, stiffening a bit against what she thought Sue's obstinacy, “if I would accept it of you? You said once that one ought to give others a chance to be unselfish once in a while, and that it was quite as beautiful to accept graciously as to give graciously.”

“Did I? Well, then, I must have been talk-

ing through my hat. Oh, Virginia, how that sounded," cried poor Sue, for in spite of her independence and love of slang, she never uttered a word of it before Mrs. Marshall that she did not wince. As for Thad, that teasing boy reveled in Sue's unconventional speeches, and nothing pleased him better than to get her to break out in some startling expression. But, after all, Thad's heart was far from hard; and seeing he had Virginia on the verge of a "tantrum" and Sue near tears, he veered suddenly to kindness and said:

"Look here, girls; I am only teasing. Now just let your grandfather tell you something; this will all straighten itself out, so don't go to getting mad about it, for it will come out all right some day."

But though Thad was at his merriest in this boyish peacemaking and Mrs. Marshall did her best to make them forget their difference, there was a decided quiver in Sue's voice when she bade Virginia good night, and the two girls parted with the nearest approach to coldness that had ever come between them.

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"Virginia! Virginia!" surely that was Sue's voice.

Virginia, who was just dressing for luncheon, stood listening.

“Virginia! Virginia!” it was Sue—it was! Throwing on her red kimona and doing up her hair with one pin, Virginia rushed to the window. Sue, her face flushed with running, her eyes dancing with joy, stood on the lawn beneath, waving a letter gaily over her head, guarded by Thad.

“What is it?” cried Virginia. “Why, Sue, why don’t you come up?”

“Oh, Virginia, Thad won’t let me! This letter was at home when I got there last night. I fairly sat up with it, and came this morning the minute that Masie would let me, and now Thad, horrid boy, says I shan’t go up to you. Hurry, dress and come down, that’s a dear! No, I *am* going up! There, Thad Clayton, let me go!”

“No you don’t!” laughed Thad, catching Sue as she turned to fly past him. “Here is poor Aunt Sibyl at the dining-room window, and here I am expiring to hear this wonderful news, and you two will get up there and bill and coo, and we will never be thought of.”

“O Thad!” begged both girls at once, Virginia dropping on her knees and wringing her

hands, while Sue struggled wildly with her tormentor.

“Thad me no Thads!” retorted that wicked boy, bracing himself and standing calmly, as Sue wasted her strength in her futile efforts.

“You sick!” jeered Sue. “You weak! It’s all gammon and you ought to be a half-back on a ’Varsity football team this minute, instead of being mollicoddled around here. You are a fraud, and I am going to write to your father! Then no South America for you, but back you’ll go to college!”

“Nothing would please me better,” chuckled Thad, taking a fresh hold as Sue almost slipped from his hands.

“I don’t believe it. You are just playing sick. You are as strong as an elephant,” panted Sue.

“So glad you admire my strength,” grinned Thad.

“O Sue,” wailed Virginia from above, dropping her tousled head on her arms and looking like a poppy among her red draperies. “O Sue, he’ll never let you go and I can’t wait another minute. Read it there, like a good child, and we’ll take it out of him afterwards.”

“Well, I just hate to give up to him,” Sue



AND DOING UP HER HAIR WITH ONE PIN, VIRGINIA RUSHED TO THE WINDOW.



groaned deceitfully. "Please stand aside, sir, I can't read it if you hold my hand."

"No you don't, my lady! I see your little game, but I'm not so anxious to hold your hand as you seem to think," teased Thad. "I'll just hold this and if you run it will come off, and then I will tell Miss Cutting you wear a switch."

"Martha Cutting!" Sue's scorn was fine to see.

"Sue—*please*, Sue," came Virginia's wail. "Don't spend all the precious time fighting with Thad. I'm in an almost fainting condition from suspense."

And so, being held ignominiously by her long black braid, Sue was forced to read her letter.

"It is from Aunt Serena. She's the one who gave me all the Indian things. Sometimes I love her awfully," explained Sue to Mrs. Marshall, "and sometimes I—well, I do the other thing; but this time I adore: 'My dear Susan Plenty' . . . you don't need to snicker, Thad Clayton, you know perfectly what my name is . . . 'My dear Susan Plenty, I have just received a letter from my dear friend, Miss Elizabeth Hope, saying she will be glad to take you as a pupil into her delightful school

for girls this coming year. I had written to her some time ago asking her to take you into Hope Hall, as I am very anxious to have you under her influence. You sadly need discipline, my child.'—"

"You do! You do, indeed, my child!" murmured Thad, taking a firmer clutch on the long braid.

"What if I do?" sneered Sue with withering contempt.

"Go on," cried Virginia, "Go on, Sue, never mind him."

"Well, then," went on Sue, reluctantly, "there . . . I am not going to read all this curtain lecture, though Aunt Serena is a darling, and I forgive her every word of it. But, anyway, it is a beautiful school, about a hundred miles from here, and father has met Miss Hope and she is a regular peach. She has accepted my name and I'm to go the twenty-eighth of September and Aunty is sending me clothes—and O, Virginia," and Sue dropped the letter and lifted two as appealing arms as ever Romeo lifted to Juliet. "Oh, Virginia, say you'll go with me!"

"Don't be a goosey, Sue. Of course, I'm going. Thad Clayton, let her go this minute,"

ordered Virginia, imperiously. "I must dress and write to Miss Hope. Gracious, suppose I should be too late! Let her go, Thad."

"O Virginia!" Sue cried the moment she rushed into her chum's arms.

"O Sue, is n't it the most perfect thing that ever was! And we'll room together!"

"Of course! Wild horses could n't part us! And I am going to take all my Indian stuff and set up a real tepee instead of a cozy corner. Uncle David has one and I know he'll lend it to me. And, Virginia, Aunt Serena is sending me a blue gown! Blue! Think of it! I'd look like a saffron bag! But she is sending that beautiful new shade of red for the twins' Sunday dresses, and Betty said right away that they would trade with me. Is n't that dandy of them?"

"Sue, for goodness' sake, where is my other shoe? But suppose all the places should be taken and I too late!"

"Virginia Clayton, you are as crazy as a titmouse! You are trying to put your waist on upside down. There, sit down and I'll fix your hair in a jiffy."

"And, Sue, there is one thing—now stop, I want to look you right in the eyes."

“O Virginia, do sit still. Pshaw, I had the loveliest coil and you jumped around and spoiled it all!”

“Well, promise I can give you a hat. Please, Sue, may n’t I? I have n’t a sister nor a soul to give hats!”

“Of course you may,” laughed Sue. “If you’ll promise in return I may do your hair. There, is n’t that fine?”

“That comb just a wee bit more to the left. It is beautiful. Thank you so much. Of course you may do mine, and I’ll do yours. Dear me, wait a moment. But you were horrid to me last night and nearly broke my heart.”

And with their arms about each other and all differences settled, they went gaily down the stairs.

CHAPTER VIII

GETTING READY

C HERRYFAIR was like a bee-hive. To be sure boys can't sew, but they can run errands, and thread needles, and keep track of thimbles and scissors; even Mandy Dobbins was pressed into service, and sat up in Mrs. Roberts's pleasant room running the sewing machine until everything hummed.

Sue was really going away to school. She awoke with the joy of it in the morning and she sank to sleep with the thought hugged to her heart. It seemed so wonderful to see father's shabby old trunk brought down from the attic and know it was for her this time, and to see dear Masie, laying the pretty clothing as it was finished, in neat piles in the deep tray. How daintily fresh was each garment; how soft and white! For Aunt Serena had sent yards of beautifully fine cambric and long cloth. She said in a note, "Quality should make up for lack of trimmings and that plain hems were most suitable for a schoolgirl."

Over the meagerness of it all Virginia frowned sometimes, though she would never let Sue suspect it; but Sue herself—why, Sue thought her “setting out” fit for a princess. That is, you see, the beauty of never having had a surfeit. How could Virginia understand Sue’s wild delight over a certain little breakfast-jacket, made out of an old cashmere cape and a bit of yak lace that her mother dyed old rose, and finished with French knots? Yet she agreed with Pink Morris that Sue was bewitching in it. How could she know the satisfaction with which Sue regarded herself in her new Sunday gown of red cloth with its bands of black braid and rows of tiny black buttons? Then there was a captivating muff and jaunty toque, made by her own clever fingers. Even Virginia grew enthusiastic when she saw them.

“They are lovely, Sue! You’ve got it in you, and you can’t any more help it than you can help breathing! That black wing is just at the angle, a jab that side would have been prim, a whiff that side rakish—but now it looks as if it had grown there. It would n’t make any real difference if you live in Monroe or Timbuctoo! You would look Frenchy in Cork! It’s your air!”

But Mrs. Roberts sighed and then said laughingly:

“If she only keeps her skirt-bindings mended and her stockings darned, Virginia, I shan’t trouble about her air.” For Sue had promised and promised, and had accepted the dainty new work basket with its thread and needles, scissors and thimble, all complete from Masie’s loving hands as if it had been a sacred charge—as indeed it was.

There was a dark-blue sailor suit for school, and her old black skirt made over, and three pretty new shirt-waists. There was a wine colored house dress, made out of the remnants of her mother’s one tea gown, with a silk front from one of Aunt Serena’s boxes, and some tiny gilt buttons that had been on Phil’s velvet suit when he was a little chap. These made up her wardrobe, not forgetting the two pairs of kid gloves that Aunt Serena sent—to be sure, one pair was blue, to match the gown Aunt Serena had intended for her, and she had n’t a thing to go with them; and the other pair was black—but they were *gloves* and kid, and they *fitted*, so joy be!

Then, this last under Masie’s protest (she had n’t the heart to refuse her girl so innocent a pleasure though she very much doubted its

good taste), there was a wonderful Indian dress of bright red canton-flannel all cut in fringes and trimmed with beads and elk's teeth, and there was a real Indian bonnet—fancy an Indian maiden in a warrior's bonnet—made of eagle feathers and red braid. It would have puzzled the Smithsonian Institution to discover to what tribe she belonged as she danced about her father's study brandishing her tomahawk, and singing gaily as a bobolink:

“Wholly, wholly, Sky-o-molly!
Shaw-buck-a-lo!
Shally-a-a-a!”

but she was the most winning and tantalizing little squaw.

This Indian dress, by the way, was a secret even from Virginia. The children knew, of course, Sue always had to share all her plans with “those inquisitive creatures,” she said; but she would n't have missed the delight of Davie's and Ben's surprised eyes, or of Phil's reluctant admiration, for the world. Of course the twins had a hand in its making, and had strung beads and cut fringes one whole happy afternoon, while Ben enacted Sister Ann, looking from the watchtower of Masie's window, for who knew at what dear, delightful, exciting moment Virginia might appear, and then,

pop! the dress was to vanish into the top bureau drawer, and everybody was to be meekly hemming ruffles, as innocent as nuns. It was all Sue's planning but, dear me, Virginia never came over until after tea, though I don't know how many false alarms there were, when bead boxes were upset, and elks' teeth hopped about on the floor like peas out of a pod.

"My me!" sighed Peggy delightedly. Sue was folding up the gay suit just finished and laying it away in the trunk. "I feel as if we had been living on a volcano all afternoon and I've that happy tired-out feeling, as if something dreadful had been going to happen and did n't, and all the time it was nothing but Virginia's coming. There never was anybody so good at inventing plays as our Sue, they seem just that real!"

"And now she is going away," moaned Betty, as she picked up the basting-threads from the carpet. "I don't know what we shall do," her lip quivered and she hid her face a minute in Sue's scarlet apron that hung on a chair.

"Why, I'll tell you, chickies," laughed Sue, banging down the trunk lid. "You are going to have my mantle fall on you and invent all sorts of jolly times. Then I'm coming home

Christmas, and think how good it will be to have me back again!"

"Huh," grunted Phil from the old couch where he was reading, "I'll bet you'll be as glad to be back as we will be to have you; for if you are n't about the homesickest—"

"Most homesick, you mean," corrected Betty wiping her eyes on the corner of the apron. "You can't say homesickest!"

"Yes you can, and I do," said Phil, "she will be the homesickest—because there is n't any other word to describe her state—girl that ever—"

"Happened!" finished Sue, gently laying a cushion on him and then sitting down upon it. "But Mr. Phil you are mistaken. I am going to have the gayest, jolliest, swellest time a girl ever had. I'm going to study like fun, and learn like the mischief—"

"I guess that's it," grunted Phil under his burden—"like fun and the mischief! They will be sending for father to come and take you home before the week's out; but I'll . . . " and suddenly the boy's voice grew husky and in spite of the weight upon his chest, an awkward boyish arm stole round Sue, and he added half laughing, half defiant, "but I'll stand by you, old girl, if the house falls."

“Send her home,” cried the twins in dismay. “Why that would be awful,” and Betty added under her breath, “a family disgrace!”

But Sue patted Phil’s hand and said with a happy laugh:

“I’ll remember that, Phil, when the time comes, that you’ll stand by me. But goodness me, I won’t ever need you, for I’m going to be as good as gold.”

One dreadful day that little scene came back to Sue like a vision, and how she longed for the touch of that dear brother’s hand, and how she recalled Betty’s frightened words, “a family disgrace!”

But on that summer evening she jumped up in a gay flurry and went to help Mandy with the tea and all was forgotten.

Masie and Sue found time for some sweet talks together even in those busy days, and there were some happy moments, too, snatched from the flying hours, to slip into her father’s study and perch on the arm of his chair and there with an arm around his neck, and her hand in his, to talk a little together with full hearts. Father and Masie were so anxious, as Sue understood better every day, for her to be good and gentle and brave. They believed in her and trusted her. Hard times were com-

ing, perhaps, and so it behooved her to make all she could out of the golden opportunity that Aunt Serena had so kindly made possible.

“Perhaps I ought not to go and leave you all,” said Sue one day as she sat on father’s chair arm. “Perhaps you need me more than ever.”

“No,” said her father stroking the little brown hand he held. “This is just what your mother and I wished for you; a year with the best teaching, the best of influences, and we want you to have as happy a time as a girl can. We have been perhaps, as Aunt Serena says, too lenient. It is for you to prove, Sue, if our method has been wise and our faith in you not misplaced. But, little daughter, there will be much in the coming year that will tell in your after life for good or ill. It will be the turning point, and I want you to promise me that when you are far away from us you will not forget.”

And Sue bent her curly head and promised with all her heart.

Over at Kinikinnick, Virginia, too, was getting ready; but for a girl who has had all sorts of journeys, and seen many places, a trip of a hundred miles and a year in a country boarding-school were far less novel incidents than

it was to Sue. Beside, too, much of her attention was given to Thad, who was all excitement over the delights of his journey with his father, since he had learned it was to be a scientific expedition, and that Professor Prescott and Dr. Yoder were both to be in the party, and that he was to be allowed some part in the work, as well as in the play. They were to start early in September and Thad's joy knew no bounds.

Virginia and Thad were getting better acquainted since Sue had come into their lives. As her father said, Sue had a real gift in making people discover each other, and this gift had helped beautifully with Thad and Virginia.

Mrs. Marshall saw it all and smiled her wise, calm smile and borrowed Sue whenever she could and loved her dearly, in spite of her rollicking manner—though Betty was her real favorite.

Virginia was busily folding some gowns away in a big hamper one morning, as Thad came sauntering by.

“May I come in, Nixie?” he asked leaning in the doorway. “Aunt Sibyl is busy, and it is as lonely as Sahara downstairs when a fellow can't read.”

“Why, of course,” said Virginia jumping up and dragging an East Indian chair over by the

window, "here is a footstool and a cushion, so settle yourself in comfort. I will be through in a few moments and then I will read to you."

"What are you doing?" he asked listlessly as she stuffed sleeves with tissue paper and pulled out frills. "Not packing for your journey yet, I hope."

"Well hardly," laughed Virginia, who could have gone to Europe on a day's notice. "Aunty and I had a little talk this morning, and we decided these would better be laid away."

"What is the matter. Too many duds?"

"No-o-o," replied Virginia slowly, not knowing if it were quite right to take Thad into her confidence; but seeing he seemed interested and being full of her subject, she continued; "you see Thad, Sue Roberts is the most independent girl I ever knew. They are very poor, but she won't let me give her a single thing. Yes, she did consent to a hat, and she only did that to get rid of me. But you know, Thad, how I should love to share everything with her. I have so much and she has so little. Not that she does not always look pretty, for she does, but because I love her so much, and because it would be almost like having a sister. You can see how she is with me, why she shares

her whole family—and everything that she possesses.”

“I like Sue all the better, Virginia, for her independence. She is a trump. That Cutting girl is a bird of another feather.”

“Do you know, Thad, I am learning to like Martha Cutting. I did n’t understand her at first, but now I can not see why you and Sue dislike her so much. But Sue is my dearest friend and I am sure I would not feel as she does if I were in her place. But the only way for me to do, since she won’t accept anything, is to dress plainly myself. She is n’t to know, for she would never consent, but I am only going to take my simplest things. Thad, don’t you think we ought to give some sort of a party before we leave Kinikinnick? Aunty and I do. To be sure I have had the girls out a good many afternoons, but I mean a real evening party. The girls have been so lovely to me, and you are so much better, I really believe it would do you good.”

“Well, for the love of mercy, you don’t expect me to be the one boy among that crowd of girls,” groaned Thad, starting up in mock horror.

“Don’t be a silly, Thad! There are some nice

boys in Monroe. There is Bruce Morris, Pink's brother, and Edwin Taylor, Albert and Sidney Reed, and Will McBride; then of course we would invite Phil and Cedric even if they are younger, and I am going to invite Betty and Peggy and little Clara Wilkins, their chum, for they would all enjoy it so. We can have dancing on the east veranda, and lanterns in the shubbery, and ices out in a tent on the lawn—"

"Oh, if you have it all settled," broke in Thad, pulling himself reluctantly out of his comfortable chair, "what have you consulted me for?"

"Oh, Thad, please don't get grumpy!" begged Virginia. "Honestly, I was just making it up as I went along. *Please* be good and help."

"Well, it seems to me we ought to do something," agreed Thad, seeing Virginia really was in earnest. "But I would have it very simple and informal and we will all have a better time. Don't you agree with me, Aunty?" for Mrs. Marshall was standing in the doorway, with her hand full of poppies.

"Come in, Aunty dear," cried Virginia. "Come in and help Thad and me decide about our party."



MRS. MARSHALL WAS STANDING IN THE DOORWAY.

"I am glad to come in and help upon that question," replied Mrs. Marshall, "for I feel we owe a great deal to the young people of Monroe, they have made your summer so pleasant. What shall we do?"

"Well, I was thinking of a sort of reception with dancing afterward, but Thad says something informal."

"A dress-suit on a hot night, Aunt, is an abomination!"

"And I very much doubt, my dears, if there is a dress-suit possessed by a High-school boy in Monroe; that comes with graduation night, you see. We are not in New York, now."

"All the girls have dainty gowns," protested Virginia.

"Then let them wear them, but make it informal by driving over to invite them; just say it is to be a very simple evening party, and there need be no embarrassment. You can have your dance, but you must add games for those who don't care for dancing, and I think I shall invite some guests of my own, Mrs. Roberts, Mrs. Taylor and Mrs. Reed, to assist me in my duty of seeing you have a good time."

"There, that is just like you, Aunt, to think of the sweetest things," declared Virginia waving a kiss to Mrs. Marshall. "I was just long-

ing to invite Mrs. Roberts, she is so good to me; but I never thought of dear Mrs. Taylor, and I know she would love to come. There, that is all ready for Andrew to take up to the storeroom," and Virginia closed the hamper and rose.

"Well," said Thad mournfully, "as I am too aged and infirm to dance, and don't know any games, I suppose I must be a wallflower at this social function, but I'll entice Phil and Cedric off into my study, they would rather see my little electric engine run than go to fifty parties, and I would n't be surprised if I could coax off every boy with the promise of an experiment or two. They would be much more interesting to a boy than a girl with a fan."

"*You!*" laughed Mrs. Marshall. "Don't you worry, Virginia. He'll never miss a dance. As for Phil and Cedric—if I know boys, and I think I do—even the charms of experiments and electric engines will pale before ice cream and frappé."

CHAPTER IX

A BIT OF NEWS

“THE boys were going to have the bus and take us out to Kinikinnick that way, but Martha Cutting told Bert Reed—she is going with him of course, and we had meant to go higgley-piggley and have such fun—that she for one would n’t go in the bus, for the Claytons would think we were acting like a lot of country bumpkins going to a fair. So Bert has engaged Mr. Hill’s carriage, and as that is the only one in town I suppose we will have to walk or stay at home, for ever since Martha put it that way we girls feel horrid about going in the bus. That girl has a perfect genius for making one feel uncomfortable.” Pink Morris threw herself with such despair into Avis Taylor’s hammock that the ropes creaked in protest.

“Why don’t you say she makes one feel like ‘thirty cents,’ it is so much more expressive,” laughed Sue. She had walked into Monroe on an errand for her father and had run in to call

on Avis. Pink seeing her on passing had joined them on the veranda.

“I can tell you, Sue,” said Avis soberly, “that this is really no laughing matter. Of course Bert Reed can afford a carriage; Cousin Edward says he has sent to Easton for roses for Martha; and Sid Reed can take their own buggy—that does n’t sound as fine as a carriage, but it is better than a bus.”

“And I don’t see,” broke in Pink, “who in the world Sid would take as he is so bashful, he would die driving alone with a girl. It was only the idea of all of us being together, where he would be lost in the shuffle, that made him think of accepting. I had to coax him an hour before he said he would go.”

“Yes,” went on Avis, “and there are Cedric and little Clara—Belle will want to look after her, and of course, Ceddie could have come with the crowd, but now—”

“But now what!” cried Sue, “why just this, you are all going in the bus and you are going to stop for Phil and me—Betty and Peggy are invited with mother to tea, so will go early. I met Will McBride and Sid as I came out of the postoffice and we settled it right there, besides Virginia suggested it to me herself. Such foolishness! is Martha running us?”

“Sue, you are a darling! Here we girls have been having a fit over that bus for two mortal days, and you settle it by a word!”

“I’m sure,” protested Pink earnestly, “all the time I would rather have ridden with Will McBride in the old bus for the rest of my life than with Bert Reed in a carriage for a mile!”

“Oh, we never doubted that!” shrieked Avis and Sue together, falling into each other’s arms in their delight over poor Pink’s blunder.

“You mean—mean things,” she protested, blushing as rosy as her name. “You know I didn’t mean that!”

“Mean what?” cried those naughty girls laughing harder than ever.

“Well, I only meant,” faltered Pink, “he is n’t handsome, nor rich, nor dashing like Bert, but he is good, and bright—”

“It was horrid of us, Pink,” admitted Sue. “But you know how you love to get a joke on us and it is so seldom we have a chance with you, you are such a sly minx.”

“And now that the getting there is settled,” and Avis sank back in her chair as if a great weight was off her mind, “let’s talk clothes.”

“Oh yes!” exclaimed Pink, enthusiastically, “Mother is making me a pink dimity with just the least V at the neck, and elbow sleeves.

Of course I could n't have had it if this had n't been our senior year and I will really need it for evenings, as there will be something going on."

"And I've a new white organdy," said Avis, "and Belle a dotted Swiss. Even little Clara has the cutest blue lawn. What are you going to wear, Sue?"

Sue was taken quite off her guard. She had been so delighted when Virginia had unfolded her plan that she had never once thought of a gown.

"I hope you will wear the evening gown you are going to take away to school," continued Avis, "we all want to see it so much."

"My evening gown—?"

"Why, yes," said Pink, "of course we know you must have something lovely for little affairs, you are always so stylish, Sue. I hope it is ever so much prettier than Martha's—"

Here, to Sue's astonishment, Avis gave a warning cry, and Pink popped her hand over her mouth as if she had just let escape a state secret.

"What is it?" begged Sue, having all an average girl's inquisitiveness. "What is it? Why, Pink Morris, I did n't think you would be so mean as to keep a secret from me!"

“But Sue,” said Pink—it was evident that both girls were longing to tell—“but, Sue, we found it out in such a queer way; and besides . . . it . . . well, it won’t make you a bit happier; indeed, we are afraid it will make you quite miserable!”

“Yes, quite,” Avis assured Sue, looking at her pityingly. “And Virginia, too—it might spoil the party for you both. No, we can’t tell—”

“Unless,” went on Pink reluctantly, as if the secret were being forced from her—as she really thought it was, though Sue was doing nothing but looking at her imploringly with her hands clasped as if in prayer.

“*Please!*” Sue whispered breathlessly, thinking the whole thing a joke. “Please let me know the worst. I think I can bear it!”

“Well,” said Pink. “Well—!”

“Oh, Pink, ought we to tell?” broke in Avis, her sweet face crinkled with anxiety. “I’m afraid it will make trouble!”

“I know it will. I just won’t tell!” and Pink turned from temptation and hid her face in the hammock cushion.

“So there really is something then. I thought all the time you were both pretending,” said Sue in a matter-of-fact way, seeing

that not only was there a secret, but that she must gain it by strategy. "I'm afraid I have n't time to stay *very* long for it, but just tell me this: Have you promised not to tell?"

"Oh, no," cried both girls, "no one knows we know!"

"We each ran against a part of it," explained Pink. "And when we told each other—we have never had a secret we did not share in our lives—then we put two and two together, and behold!"

"Will I know it sometime?"

"Oh, yes, soon!"

"Could I prevent its happening if I knew?"

"No, it is too late!"

"Is it something to happen?"

"Yes, indeed! Isn't it, Avis? And you won't like it a bit, Sue, not a bit!"

"Is it dead or alive?"

"Oh, very much alive," giggled Avis.

"Ugly, or pretty?"

"Some people think it lovely!" Pink was enjoying the cross examination so much she could n't help giving Avis a sly wink and forming 'Bert' silently with her lips.

But Sue was too quick for her.

"It's alive, Bert thinks it lovely, and it will make me unhappy." She thought for a mo-

ment and then added triumphantly: "It's Martha Cutting!"

"Sue Roberts, you're the brightest thing that ever lived," cried Avis admiringly.

"Then it is Martha. Well, tell me the rest. What did she say?"

"Nothing."

"Then what has she done?"

"She has n't done it, she is just going to. But we are not going to tell," and Pink closed her lips firmly. "It will be bad enough when you see her there!"

This was a slip, as Sue saw by the expression of dismay on both faces.

"At Virginia's?" she asked, pressing her advantage.

"No."

"Why, I am not going any other place, except Hope Hall."

"Oh-o-o-o!" wailed Avis.

"You don't mean—you *can't* mean she is going there!"

Pink suddenly raised her face from the cushion, red and anxious.

"That is it, Sue. You have guessed it, and we have been acting like a pair of sillies, anyway. Sit down again, and I'll tell you all I know. You see, Bruce was up at the schoolhouse one

day with Mr. Keen, when Martha Cutting and her mother came in. Mrs. Cutting told Mr. Keen that she wanted all Martha's standings for the last three years, as she had decided to send her away to school, because she wished her to have better teaching in an atmosphere of more culture than she could find in Monroe. You know Mrs. Cutting and her toploftiness! Well, Mr. Keen showed he did n't like it very well, Martha is such a splendid scholar, you know, and he has been so interested in her work. Then she always did have a way of getting around her teachers—"

"She had her lessons better than the rest of us; that's one way," interpolated Avis.

"You know what I mean, Avis Taylor, perfectly. It was n't all lessons nor talent. She did things to gain favor that the rest of us would n't stoop to, and that made us appear in a bad light. I don't want to be unjust to her; she is bright and pretty, and seems always refined, but she does n't ring true, and you know it."

"But how do you know she is going to Hope Hall?" inquired Sue.

"Just wait a moment and you will see. Bruce told me when he came home; he could n't help overhearing; they never noticed him, as he was

helping Mr. Keen behind the screen. We are all in the same class, so, of course, we were interested. Well, the day before, Avis met Martha in the postoffice, and you know how she always loves to make you think she has a secret—”

“Yes,” broke in Avis, feeling this was her part of the story, “but I never would have suspected at all if she had n’t kept flourishing a letter she had just received. It was in a lavender envelope, with a violet seal, and you know, Sue, Virginia had one just like it that last day you drove up here. Don’t you remember, Virginia said she always saw violets when she thought of Miss Hope, because she seemed so fond of that color, and we talked of character in handwriting and admired hers so much. So I knew at once it was a letter from Miss Hope, and exclaimed over it. Martha did n’t like it a bit when she found I knew, for she had only meant to make me curious; but when I asked her about it she said she supposed there was no law against other girls beside Sue Roberts and Virginia Clayton going to Hope Hall, though from the talk in Monroe, one would imagine they were the first that had ever gone anywhere. Then she sailed away with her nose in the air, but when she found I did n’t run

after her, she brought her sewing over that afternoon and was as sweet as peaches. Of course, we never mentioned school."

"Her mother has been sewing for her for weeks," said Pink, "and she is getting some dresses made in Dexter. She told Mildred Warner that her aunt had promised to take her to Europe, if she received first prize in both voice and piano at school, but she did not say where she was going. And that is every blessed thing we know!"

"That's enough! More than a-plenty, thank you!" ejaculated Sue, taking her head in both hands, as if she was afraid it would fly off. "I feel like the old German woman who said when her cow died, 'Now, I'd chust as soon lif as die!'"

"Oh, Sue," begged Avis, "are you pretending, or have we most broken your heart? Martha is a real nice girl in lots of ways."

"Now, Avis, don't add insult to injury! Who ever said she was n't? It is only that Martha and I are like oil and water, fire and tow, the lion and the lamb, match and gunpowder, and lots of other things! We are both all right in our place, but we don't mix well. I pity Miss Hope!"

“But, Sue,” persisted Pink, “have we done wrong in telling you—”

“Of course not. Why, if it had been sprung on me suddenly at the party or the station, who knows—I might have fainted or fallen in a fit, and have had to be carried home on a shutter!”

“Sue Roberts, stop your nonsense!” protested Pink. “Don’t you see Avis is just ready to cry, and that I feel as mean as spuds?”

“Well, you need n’t,” declared Sue, giving Avis an affectionate little pat and throwing Pink a kiss. “I’m all right and it was best that Virginia and I should know. I might have hurt Martha’s feelings in some way. But I see I’ve got a job cut out for me, and that’s to learn to like that girl and make her like me, for she’s my fate. Goodness, did that clock strike eleven? And I promised Mandy I would make the salad for luncheon! Good-by, girls, I’ve got to scurry,” and away she flew.

“Why, she never told us what she was going to wear to the party!” commented Avis, half an hour later, when the two girls had quieted their conscience by going in and confessing it all to gentle Mrs. Taylor, who had given them the scolding they felt they deserved, and sent them away comforted.

CHAPTER X

DAVIE TO THE RESCUE

MANDY DOBBINS was hanging up the clothes in the back yard, and Sue stood at the kitchen table washing the breakfast dishes, while Betty polished the glasses until they shone.

“It seems to me, Sue,” said Peggy, in a disconsolate voice—she was scouring the knives with her board on the window sill—“that you are about the quietest I ever saw you. We always have such fun out here in the kitchen wash-days, and we have n’t sung ‘There is a goose,’ or ‘Whoopsy saw,’ or anything!”

“All right, honey,” and Sue broke into a half-smile and began in a strained voice,

“Whoopsy craw, sine craw,
The Robertses come to town—”

“Well, why don’t you both pipe up! I don’t feel like singing a solo.” For both Peggy and Betty had failed to join in her song.

“It sounded like a funeral,” grumbled

Peggy, "there was no more fun in your voice than a tombstone. I just hate that kind of funning. All right for you, Sue Roberts; next time we won't sing when *you* want to," and with this dire threat Peggy gave herself up to the absorbing task of polishing the butcher knife.

"Sue," said Betty seriously, as she shook out a fresh tea-towel and looked up at the clock. "In four days and eleven hours we will be at Virginia's party! I wish she had n't asked us so long ahead. It's awful to wait so long, when you have never been to a real party in your life."

"It seems most a billion years," agreed extravagant Peggy. "I'm that afraid I'll die before it gets here, I don't like to go to sleep."

"Clara Wilkins told me at Sunday School" went on Betty, "that her blue lawn has a lace yoke, and she is going to wear Belle's second best sash. I do wish you had something to lend, Sue. It's so lovely to wear borrowed clothes!"

"I don't think so," snapped Sue, banging the pan so fiercely she pushed her favorite little blue bowl to the floor with a crash. "There, that served me right for being so cross!" she groaned, as she gathered up the bits. "I'm

all out of sorts this morning, and I warn everybody off the premises.”

“What is it, dear?” inquired Mrs. Roberts, coming in with a pan of beans she had just gathered in the garden. “Anything wrong, little daughter?”

“There are two things, Masie. One is I just *can't* be happy about Martha going to Hope Hall, and the other is that Virginia has found out I am going to wear my white shirt-waist suit to the party, and she is bound to lend me her pink silk muslin—she has never worn it here—and I won't have it, and she is hurt about it.”

“As for Martha's going, you must, my child, for your own sake, get over that foolish feeling. I am so sorry that rose lawn Aunt Serena sent you faded, that would have been very nice to wear, but I am afraid it is out of the question,” said her mother with a sigh.

“My!” said Betty, with a deep breath. “I'm thankful ours were white! If they had been fadey and we should have had to stay at home, I think I should have perished!”

“Virginia says Pink and Avis were right about my needing an evening dress at school,” went on Sue, nervously, “and she is begging

me to accept the pink for always, but, of course, I won't."

"No, of course not!" said Mrs. Roberts emphatically. "I feel troubled about the hat. To be sure, it is simple—"

"I'm sure it could n't have cost much," cried Sue, as if her mother was about to wrest it from her. No one knew how often she slipped out of bed to try on the hat before the old mirror. It was such a beautiful hat, so apart from anything Sue had known, and her heart fairly cleaved to it.

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Roberts cheerily. "You can wear the shirt-waist suit with one of your new linen collars and your red tie, that will be very pretty and girlish."

Sue groaned. Masie had n't seen many evening parties; for that matter, neither had Sue, but she felt sure that girls did n't usually wear linen collars and red ties, and there was the pink gown—But no, no! and Sue's head went up in the air. It was quite bad enough to accept benefits from one's relatives, but from one's chum—never!

Yet later that afternoon, when Davie went flying up to the wigwam to beg for a rubber band for his new sling-shot, he found Sue lying

on her divan, and there was grief and despair in every line of the slender figure that lay among the gay pillows.

“Why-e-e! What’s the matter, Sue?” faltered Davie, in his astonishment. Sue to cry—Sue! Betty and Peggy had their weeping times, to be sure, and nobody thought anything of it, but not Sue. “Are you sick, shall I call Masie?”

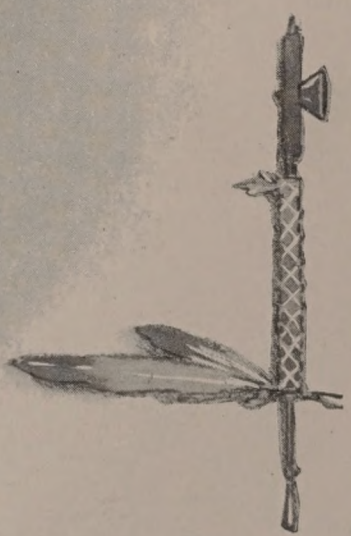
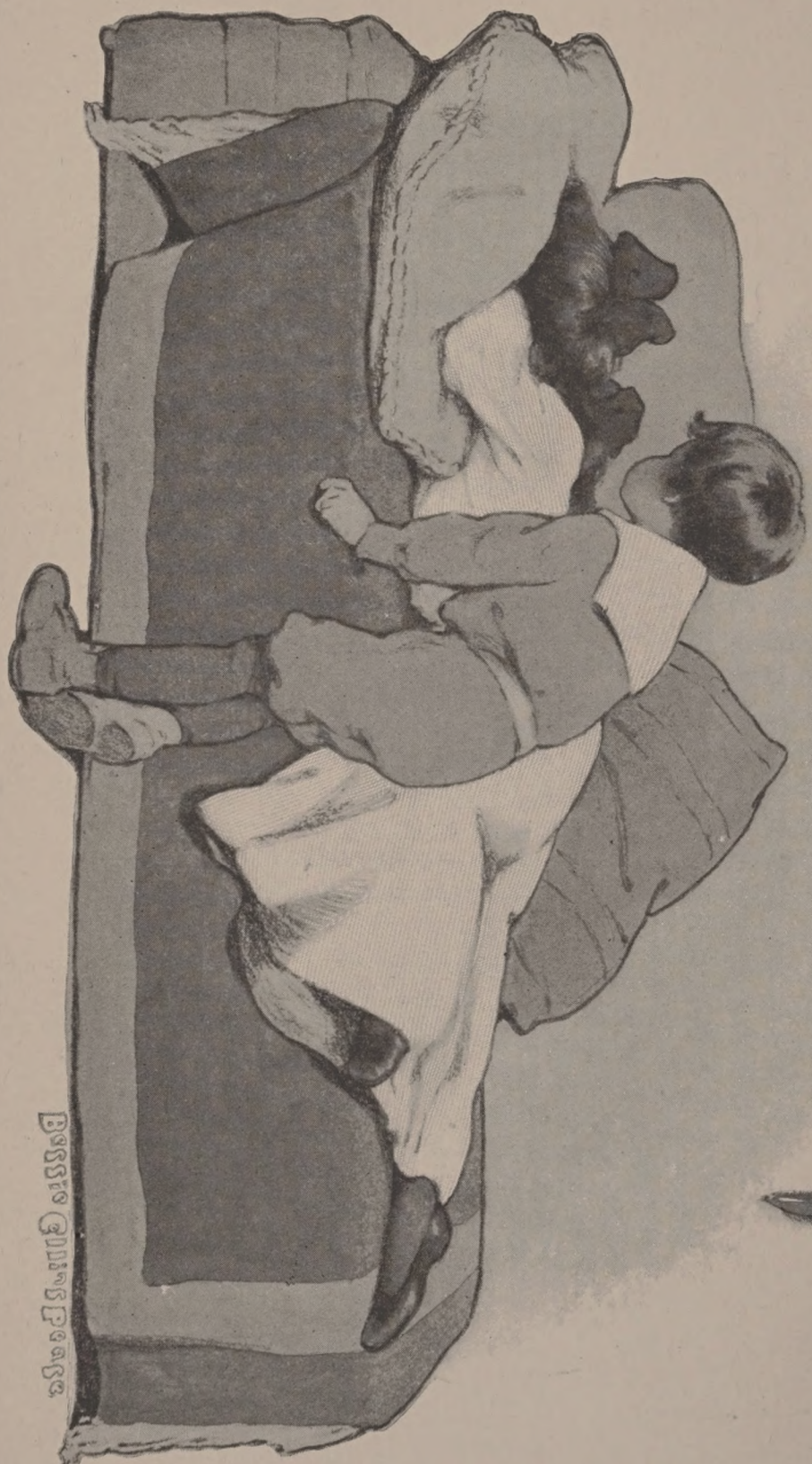
“No-o-o! Not on your life!” sobbed Sue. “Go away, Davie, and shut the door. I’m . . . I’m . . . crying like sixty, and I don’t want anybody to see me! Go away!”

“Is it your tooth or your stomach?” anxiously inquired Davie, closing the door softly and going nearer to her. “Mandy Dobbin has some bully drops, one tastes of wintergreen and the other of pep’mint, and she’ll give you your choice.”

“It is neither one, and I don’t want any drops,” sniffled Sue from the depths of her pillow. “I want you to go away, for I am a mean, hateful cat, that’s what I am!”

“Who said so?” demanded Davie, doubling his small fist. “If it was Phil or Bennie, I’ll show ’em!”

Sue lifted her head to look at her small cham-



Bessie Gillis Page

pion, and a half-smile crept over her tear-drenched face.

“Did n’t anybody say so, Davie; I think it myself. You see, here I’m getting to go away to school with a whole trunkful of new clothes; and now I’m crying like a baby, because a girl I don’t like is going, too, and because I have nothing to wear . . . to wear . . . to Virginia’s . . . party,” and Sue’s head went down again.

Davie could understand that going away to school with a person one did not like might not be pleasant, but a trunkful of clothes and nothing to wear struck him as very remarkable, yet, having been the brother of three girls since his birth, he knew that remarkable statements were to be expected. Still, it did n’t seem like Sue to cry over a little thing like a dress. Why, he did n’t remember seeing her cry since Bennie fell out of a tree and broke his arm, two whole years ago!

“What kind of a dress do you want?” inquired Davie for need of something to say.

“A-a party gown, of course, goosey, but there is no use talking; I can’t have it. I would n’t mind so much, if it was n’t for Martha Cutting; and besides, all the girls will know I

have n't an evening gown for school. I wish I had been born a Hottentot!"

"Why don't you wear your Indian dress? That'd look awful nice, and I bet none of the other girls have one with elks' teeth sewed on it!"

"Go away, Davie Roberts!" cried Sue, sharply. "What do boys know? I'd look swell dressed up like that! Of course, no other girl has elks' teeth, no girl would want them for Virginia's party! Oh, Davie, forgive me!" For Davie's lip quivered, he having been so much affected by her tears that his heart had welled with sympathy and he was greatly hurt at this summary dismissal. "I'll be all right in a little bit. I would n't have father or mother know for the world, when they have been so good to me. Promise me you won't tell. Now run away. I'm 'most cried out now."

"Why don't you write to Aunt Serena?" asked Davie, he never having been known to give up a subject when he was once started on it.

"Because she has been giving to me ever since I can remember, and because I never asked anybody for anything in my life except Uncle David."

"Then why don't you ask Uncle David?" persisted Davie.

“Go along with you, Davie Roberts!” and Sue sprang from the divan and seized him by the shoulder. “Did n’t I ask him to lend me his tepee, and did n’t he send me the darlindest ever! Am I a beggar? There, take that kiss and trot along. Forget all about it, there’s a good boy. I’m all right.”

Davie, put out bodily, heard the key turn in the lock, and after a resentful kick at the door, to show he understood her ingratitude, he went slowly downstairs and out to the barn yard.

Mandy Dobbins had gone home for the afternoon and taken the twins with her; Ben was off with Phil on an errand, and father and Masie were not to be told. There was not a creature with whom to talk of Sue’s woes except the puppy and the pig. For a long time Davie stood with his hands in his pockets watching the pig—his one possession, for Farmer Brown had given Davie the pig—jolly and fat as old King Cole, nosing the green apples that had been given him for his dinner. If only, Davie thought, he had n’t emptied his bank for that jointed fishing rod, then he could buy a dress for Sue himself. It was dreadful to think of merry old Sue crying. He’d buy a spangled dress like the lady wore who rode the horse in the circus, when Uncle David took him last

summer. Good old Uncle David! If only Uncle David knew there would be no further trouble. Jolly Uncle David, who always slapped a boy on the back and asked him if he did n't want to borrow a quarter. If Uncle David was here to ask—"

But at this point in his thoughts an idea struck Davie with great force, and dragging his hat a little farther over his ears, he started helter-skelter for the house.

"Mandy! Mandy Dobbin!" he called, as he burst breathlessly into the kitchen; "Mandy Dobbin!" but there was no response.

But, remembering that his friend and confidant had gone out for the afternoon—without waiting to consider whether he had a right to use Mandy's property without her permission—he ran into her little bedroom off the kitchen. Yes, there was her ink and pen on the window, and in a box on the table was her stationery, for Mandy's lover was a soldier in the Philippines, and much of her spare time was spent in letter-writing.

Then Davie, with his treasures, scurried away to the barn. In the harness-room he found a tobacco-pail which, turned upside down, would serve very well for a table; there was light from the high window, and he felt

that here he would be safe from interruption. Davie had not written many letters, but Miss Banks had given her pupils some business forms the last term of school that had made a great impression on Davie. It seemed so grown up and manly to write "Dear Sir," and "your esteemed favor." He was quite sure he knew how to do it. Then Miss Banks always said he wrote very well for a small boy; there would be no trouble except the spelling—the sight of a spelling-book always turned Davie sick at the stomach—but then he remembered that Uncle David said he hated spelling, too, and likely he would never know if the words were correctly spelled or not. So, comforting himself with this thought, down went Davie on his knees by the pail, and dipping his pen deep in the ink, thrusting his tongue in his cheek, and squinting his crossed eye until it was almost lost in wrinkles, he sent his pen sputtering across the paper.

"MONROE, OHIO.

"August 23, 19—.

"*My deer Sir:*

"That's what teecher said men said to eech other if you wuz riten a bizness letter and this is stricly bizness. Teecher she said put es-

teemed favor but you aint don it yit so i leavs that out. You see our Sue she aint got no party dress for virginas party and i catched her cryin up in her wigwam thats what she calls her room where she keeps her injun things. She got a lot ant sereny sent but they is day dresses cause our Sue said i wuz a goose you cant wear injun dresses to partys tall an marthy cutting she will laf if our Sue wears it. you said did i want to borro a quarter and i said what do men do an you said they give a note but our teecher she said also you can give morgage on house or farm or lif stock or anything you owned your own self and i asked her did lif stock meen a pig an she said yes. So I want to borro a dress for our Sue as i aint got no mony but 7 sents my rod it folds and cost \$2 i wist i had the mony back for it aint no good and i am now savin for a gun. i send morgage on my pig it is a nice clean pig and father he said we mite as well eat one of the fambly so mr. Read he will buy him of me this fall he is my own pig an this is a rite morgage for our teecher she showed us. i David F. Roberts of monroe Ohio in considration of one dress lended me by my unkle David for our Sue I convey to wit one said pig set my hand an seel David F. Roberts. p s our sue she does

not no nor nobody dont and dont you tell an cross your hart and hope to dye i will take good care of the pig. Your lovin neffu. David F. Roberts.

“2 p s i cant spell but nether can you.

“p s s dont take no time or our Sue will have to wear her saler sute an marthy will laf i will do somethin for you someday and don’t tell ant sereney

“D. F. R.”

It took Davie a long time to write his letter, for in spite of squinting eye and wagging tongue, the pen refused to go as it should. The teetering pail did not make the best of writing-tables, and for some reason Mandy’s pen seemed to leak ink at both ends. Still he was more than satisfied, in spite of blots, as he surveyed his finished letter, and it took all his self-control to keep from rushing off to show it to his admiring family. At last it was folded and directed, the “Judge David Fulton” staggering from corner to corner across the envelope, seemingly held on only by an extra curlicue at the lower corner.

Once more Davie slipped into the house—this time for two of the precious seven pennies—and then away he sped to mail his letter.

CHAPTER XI

IN MEMORY OF A ROSE

JUDGE FULTON, as he sat in his office, tipped himself back comfortably in his swivel chair and ran hastily through his morning mail.

The sight of his name pitching in a tipsy, sea-sick fashion across a gaily tinted envelope attracted his attention, a moment more and the look of surprise gave way to one of amusement.

“From one of Albert’s little chaps, of course,” he thought, smiling. “God bless them.” As the Judge read Davie’s remarkable letter his face brightened more and more, and when he came to the mortgage a distinct chuckle broke the silence of the office, surprising the stenographer.

“Did I startle you, Miss Ore?” asked the Judge. “I am greatly pleased with the discovery that there is material in the family for another lawyer—my little namesake. I have

a bit of unusual work for you this morning. Can you attend to it at once?"

"Yes, sir. Dictation, sir?"

"I was just wondering in what color," said the Judge, meditatively, "a black-eyed, black-haired, saucy-faced girl would look best, and what a party gown should be made of. You will remember my niece, Sue Roberts, when she was here last summer," pursued the Judge. "Well, it seems she is going to a party, and Davie and I—Davie is her little brother—want to surprise her with a new gown. We would like it as girlish and smart as girls of her age usually wear. I have noticed you have very pretty taste in dress, Miss Ore, so I am quite sure we can trust you to select a suitable evening gown for Sue."

The little stenographer glanced down at her simple white waist and plain black skirt, while the Judge beamed on her a fatherly smile.

"I am glad you think I look nice," she said with the simple directness that the Judge always found so pleasing in his demure stenographer. "But I never chose a party dress in my life. I would enjoy it very much, any girl would, and I think—yes, I am quite sure—I could find something pretty for Miss Roberts,

for I remember her very well, but I ought to tell you I have had no experience."

"Do women have to have experience in such matters?" asked the Judge, smiling. "I thought that came naturally to a girl, a sort of sixth sense. But anyway, in spite of a lack of experience, I shall trust you. A young woman who can get up so excellent and tasteful a brief will certainly be able to choose a trifle like that. So put on your hat and run along, for the gown, it seems, must be there on the instant, therefore buy it ready-made. By the way, just add to it gloves and slippers, in fact, all that goes to make the ensemble—I've no doubt you know all about it. My wife has always attended to my daughter's affairs of that sort, so I, like you, have had no experience; and, as Davie expressly states that Aunt Serena is not to be told, and since court requires my presence this morning, we, Davie and I, must throw ourselves upon your mercy. Remember, the whole outfit, please."

"And the price?" inquired Miss Ore, her hand at the door and her foolish little heart all a-flutter with joy, as if it were her own gown she were to choose. "And the price?"

"Winifred Ore," said the Judge gravely, but his twinkling eyes betraying him, "I have

never before known you to ask a useless question. Tell them to send the bill to me and see that it is enough, and please drop this card in the box.”

“And, oh, mother,” related Winnie Ore that evening, as she and her mother sat at their tea. “It was the greatest fun! I enjoyed it to my finger tips! I pretended I was going to a really, truly party and I could have cried with joy when I saw all my purchases laid in a big box. The gown, and the silk stockings, and the dear little slippers—I do so hope they will fit—I got long silk mitts to be sure of them at least, and then the darlingest fan! I could just see Sue Roberts’ eyes dance when she opened it. You know I used to tell you how dear she was when she came in the office to see Judge Fulton. Such a bright smile and pretty, friendly ways, and don’t you remember the day she laid the big pink rose on my desk? You were sick then, and my heart was so heavy and it seemed so sweet and thoughtful of her, and I did wish I could do something nice for her someday, and then to think of this dear chance coming! I’m so happy, and I do hope she will remember the rose when she sees the little pink rosebuds among the lace. Oh, I do hope she will like it!”

If Miss Ore had really grave doubts on that question, it is a great pity she could not have been present when Sue opened the big white box the expressman had just left.

“To Sue from Davie and Uncle David, assisted by Miss Winifred Ore,” read Sue, surrounded by all the family.

“Davie Roberts!” she exclaimed breathlessly, but Davie had crept under the sofa in a sudden panic as the thought of his daring overcame him. “Davie Roberts, did you go and beg of dear, generous Uncle David?”

“No, I did n’t,” came in muffled tones from under the sofa. “I did n’t beg a word, I sent him a mortgage on the pig.”

“A what?” shouted his bewildered family, and Phil, by a strategic move, grasped him by the collar and drew him into the light of day, disheveled and somewhat frightened, but still triumphant.

“Why, Miss Banks said,” faltered Davie, “when you did n’t have any money you could give a mortgage on your prop’ty, and ain’t the pig my very own? Did n’t Mr. Brown give him to me and ain’t I fed him all summer?”

“I helped,” squealed Benny, who was so excited he was capering all over the room.

PERCY'S PAGE



"I COULD JUST SEE SUE ROBERT'S EYES DANCE WHEN SHE OPENED IT."

“ ’Spose you did,” replied Davie indignantly, “I guess I lended you my fishing rod enough to pay for it. Did n’t I, Phil?”

“Come here, my son,” said Mr. Roberts, for Sue had carried her box straight to father’s study. Someway, since father was not so strong, all the pleasantest things found their way in there. “Come, Davie, and tell me all about it.”

So, standing between his father’s knees, Davie told how he had found Sue crying, of her forbidding him to tell father and Masie, of his great longing to help, and then of his splendid idea.

A shout of merriment went up from the children at the unfolding of Davie’s story, but Mr. Roberts still looked grave and said so sternly that even Masie was surprised:

“Of course, my son, you should have consulted your mother and me about this, for even if the pig is yours, boys cannot attend to a matter of business such as a mortgage unless they have the consent of their parents. I want you to carry this right through. It is a matter of business between you and Uncle David and I shall expect when Mr. Reed pays you for the pig that the money shall at once be sent to him. My boys must learn that when they sign

their name or give their word in a business it is entirely binding."

"Course," assented Davie, manfully. "I never meant anything else. I'll ask next time, father, but Sue can have her dress, can't she?"

"Yes, as a gift from her brother and uncle," replied Mr. Roberts, dismissing his small son with a pat on the back.

"O Davie! you dear boy," and Sue dropped on her knees by her little brother and caught him in her arms.

"Le' go," cried Davie, struggling to get free. "I've no time for huggin'. I told Uncle David I'd take good care of his pig, and I ain't fed him since noon. Le' go, Sue, le' go!"

How the twins jumped up and down as Sue shook out the cream silk mull gown that rustled over its taffeta lining. How they "oh"ed and "ah"ed over the tiny bunches of pink rose-buds that peeped from among the lace, and the silk stockings, and the slippers that were a perfect fit, when you had stuffed the toes with cotton, and the mitts and the little spangled fan. Even the fact that the gown proved somewhat too long and too wide failed to daunt their glee.

"It is lovely, Sue," Betty assured her. "You

can hold it up in front, and what if it does trail behind?"

"You might take Bennie and Davie to hold it up," exclaimed Peggy. "Like the ladies in our picture book!"

"You'll need a reef in the side," commented Phil remorselessly. "You look like you were poked in a meal bag."

Sue stood disconsolately before the mirror, pulling out the surplus folds that sagged about her slender figure.

"It's miles too big," she sighed, "and the party will be to-morrow night!"

"With troubles a-plenty, but never a frown,
Their laughter goes up, and no tears run down."

hummed father, catching sight of her rueful face.

Even Mrs. Roberts looked doubtful as she stroked the ruffles with a loving hand, her heart rejoicing not only over Sue's happiness and her brother-in-law's kindness, but far more over her little son's unselfishness, for she understood Davie and knew that in his boyish way he had counted the cost.

"There is so little time, dearie," she said regretfully, "it would, I fear, have to be ripped."

“Oh, bother,” groaned Sue. “It is a blooming shame, I think. I don’t care so awfully for myself as I do for Davie—it will almost break his heart, and dear little Miss Ore. I must run and write to her this minute, and blessed old Uncle David! Is all their goodness to go for nothing?”

“Law now, Miss Sue, don’t you go to worry-in’,” broke in Mandy Dobbin, who at the first hint of the good news had run upstairs to see for herself. “You don’t expect Mandy is a-goin’ to see you all disappointed like that, do you? Jest wait ’til I git my pies out of the oven and we’ll go right at it. Why, bless your heart, lambie, I’ll set up all night but you shall have it! You shall wear it even if we don’t git no hooks an’ eyes on it, an’ have to sew you up in it like a doll baby. Jest you trust Mandy Dobbin!”

CHAPTER XII

VIRGINIA'S PARTY

AS the omnibus drew up to the steps of Kinikinnick and the girls fluttered down like a flock of white doves, Sue thought she had never dreamed of a sight so lovely. The great house was all alight; the lawn festooned with garlands of fairy lamps and Chinese lanterns; the croquet ground with its gay little candles sparkling from each arch; the pretty flower-decked tent upon the green, all this in the midst of the beautiful park lighted by the big yellow lantern of the moon, seemed like fairyland to her unaccustomed eyes.

Up the broad stairs, past the village orchestra twanging strings and rosining bows, flocked the doves to the dressing room, to preen their feathers and settle their wings, and the babble of merry tongues was punctuated with exclamations and shrieks of girlish glee.

“O Virginia, it is perfectly swell!” cried Sue, for Virginia was too much one of the girls by this time to stand on ceremony, and

so had sped upstairs after them. "I'm so excited I don't know if I'm in slippers or overshoes."

"We had the most fun coming!" Pink Morris looked up at Virginia with a laughing face from where she was struggling with an unruly slipper fastening. "We had to wait fifteen minutes as usual, on Sue. Does n't she look like an angel! But from the way Mandy Dobbin was giggling when Sue came out, I believe there is some secret about her. Let's investigate!"

"Stand off!" shrieked Sue, threatening Pink with her fan. "I'm not to be examined closely, but I'm here, thank goodness. It was a very close shave!"

"You all look lovely, and we are going to have the gayest time. Every one is here except Martha and Albert," said Virginia, giving a deft touch wherever it was needed, and dancing about on her tiptoes. "They are coming, of course?"

"Oh, yes, we passed them on the road rolling slowly along in state; they really looked very grand with their driver up in front. It was Bill Lyons in Mr. Hill's old silk hat, and an overcoat. Isn't that rich? But, poor things, they looked so lonely and we were having such

fun as we dashed by. My, can't Sid Reed sing! He forgot all about his bashfulness in the crowd and sang like a bird!"

"Pink likes Will McBride's voice better. Don't you, Pinky, love?" teased Sue over her shoulder.

"Martha is really going to Hope Hall," broke in Avis to spare her chum's blushes. "She told me so to-day. There, Fan, I'll fasten your bracelet."

"I know," replied Virginia, putting an arm round Sue with a warning little pressure. "Aunty had a note from Mrs. Cutting, hoping we will have nice times together, and I am sure we will."

"But, Sue, it's a shame for you," broke in Mildred tactlessly. "You'll just hate it!"

"Not at all. Masie had a letter from Mrs. Cutting, too," replied Sue, leaning toward the mirror to give little jabs to her pompadour, and Virginia was surprised to see the face in the glass was sweetly smiling. But Mrs. Roberts and Sue had had a long talk that afternoon, over their sewing, and Sue had promised to put away any little personal jealousy against Martha as unworthy of her, and to do her best to win her friendship. It had seemed a very easy, pleasant task in that sunny, quiet room,

with Masie's sweet voice pleading with her and Masie's smiling approval of her quick decision, and so she had promised heartily to say something nice to Martha about her going. She meant to say it here at the party, for to-night in her joy in the gaiety, the lights, the music, her own pretty gown and the delight of it all, made it seem easy to be friends with saint or sinner, and so she added cheerily: "Oh, I expect Virginia will help Martha and me to find each other and that we will be the best of friends by Christmas. We don't really know each other yet."

It was at this auspicious moment Martha Cutting swept grandly into the room, and all their chatter was forgotten in the breathless little murmur of approval that went up. Martha did look lovely, and if the train to her gown, and the aigrette in her hair were absurdly out of place for her years, the girls could not help a thrill of admiration over her beauty. Even Sue's pink rosebuds, and Fan's bracelet sank into littleness before Martha's great bunch of roses, her long gloves and pearl necklace. She was in one of her prettiest moods, too, and no one could help liking Martha when she was at her best.

"Oh, girls, is n't it too lovely?" she cried.

kissing Virginia and waving them all a gay greeting. "It is the most perfect night! My, how pretty you look and you are all ready to go down, too! Just wait 'til I get a dust of powder on my nose and I'm ready."

Avis gave a little gasp as Martha, all in a twitter, opened the blue and silver bag that hung on her arm, and produced a tiny powder puff from a little silver box.

"Never mind your corn-starch, Mattie," laughed Pink, a bit contemptuously, giving her a little push, for the idea of powder on Martha's rose-leaf skin was too absurd; but Martha waved her away, and after another dab or two, and then daintily settling her filmy skirts, she was ready, and down they floated.

Staid old Kinikinnick had never seen such capering in all its sleepy existence, such dancing upon the lawn, such games of blind-man's buff and drop-the-handkerchief, such laughing, and singing, and racing back and forth, and the soul and center of it all was Sue. Her clear, strong voice led all the songs, and no girl danced so lightly, ran so swiftly, nor laughed so gaily. With her fleecy skirts tucked up, her curls flying, her bright, tantalizing laugh rippling out at every sally, there was more than one boy who thought she was the jolliest, pret-

tiest girl he had ever seen. There was danger, perhaps, that as her spirits arose her laugh rang too often and too loud, and that Sue's fun became boisterous, and her gaiety a bit rude. At least, that is what Martha Cutting said to Belle Wilkins and Albert Reed, and her voice reached Sue's ears distinctly as she swung in the hammock, on the veranda, in the shadow of the vines. She had just won two games of croquet with Thad as a partner, and he had brought her here to rest while he had gone to get her a glass of lemonade from the tent upon the lawn.

"To be sure she is quite pretty," remarked Martha. "She is bright, too, and rather dashing, but she is slangy and rude. You know, Belle, very well, that you would n't be Sue Roberts for the world."

"But, Martha," replied Belle, pleadingly, "Sue is so good and sweet. She is slangy, but she is very unselfish."

"Nonsense," interrupted Martha disdainfully. "I don't know where you see it. I never saw a girl who pushed herself in as she does. She was n't here a month until she was running after Virginia Clayton and her brother like a wild creature. Think of a refined, cul-



BOON & GILBERT

JUST WAIT TILL I GET A DUST OF POWDER ON MY NOSE.

tured girl like Virginia in such company—of course she don't care to be followed by that tomboy, but what can she do?"

"Then, why does she go away to school with Sue? I'm sure she doesn't need to do that. Every one knows she is just going to be with Sue."

"Nonsense, Belle," replied Martha, fanning herself nervously. "I don't believe a word of it. I suppose Sue would say Thad is following her to-night, but I never saw anything so brazen in my life as the way she is running after him."

At this last gibe Sue was out of the hammock with a bound, trembling with anger, her eyes flashing; but at that moment she became aware that Thad was standing beside her, his face very red and angry, but with a twinkle in his eyes as he turned toward her.

"Slow and steady, Sue," he said softly, as he offered her the glass he had brought, with his best bow, exactly as if nothing had happened; "slow and steady. Sit down and drink your lemonade. Miss Cutting will keep, you know."

But Sue sank back in the hammock, her hands clenched, her teeth shut tight to keep back the anger that was raging in her.

"Did you hear what she said, Thad?" she

gasped at last. "I'm so furious I feel like doing all sorts of dreadful things to her. When I get through with her—!"

Thad laughed. All this was so different from Virginia's anger, that cold dignity that always swept his sister out of the room and kept her still for a week, that he hardly understood how to deal with it. But this was Sue's way, she had flared up like a torch; he had reached her just in time, a moment more and her wrath would have swept her out into the light where Martha was sitting and there would have been a scene.

"Slow and steady," said Thad again, offering her the glass. "It is all right, Sue. I heard what she said, but who cares? Virginia told me this morning you are the dearest friend she ever had, and I guess you knew that anyway; as to what she said about me, why, that is foolishness. If there has been any following after, I did it, not you."

"It is n't that," groaned Sue. "I know Virginia loves me, and any one acquainted with me knows I don't push in, but O Thad, it is n't the things that are n't true that hurt so! It's the being rude and slangy. Of course I am, but I hate to hear Martha Cutting say it, and then I have given my mother my solemn prom-

ise to try and like Martha, and to tell her I hope we will be good friends at school, and I don't want to like her nor be near her. I just hate her, she is such a cat!"

"It's a beastly shame about her going at all, Sue," consoled Thad, sitting down by her. "But it can't be helped now, and the best thing it seems to me, would be to get along with as few rows as possible. That is the difference in being a boy or a girl. If you were both boys you could wait until to-morrow, and then meet her—or rather him—around a corner and give her—I mean him—an everlasting trouncing and thrash all the nonsense out of her—him. Then you would get up, dust off your clothes, shake hands and be friends for the rest of your lives. But as it is I can't see any way but to laugh it down and make yourself so nice she can't help liking you."

"That's all very well," flung out Sue, "but I like a boy's way far better. If I could hit her I think I could forgive her afterward, but this smiling business, when you are boiling within, I don't think is good for one's morals. Oh, if I could only thump her good and hard!"

"But really you can't, you know," laughed Thad; he was half teasing, though all his sympathy was with her. "She is jealous, that is

what is the matter with her, Sue, and I would n't pay any attention to it."

"Jealous," cried Sue, opening her black eyes big at him. "Martha jealous of *me*! Why, that's what Masie is afraid is the matter with me, and it may be, though I had never thought of it. But there are plenty of reasons why I might be jealous of Martha Cutting, she is so pretty, and can play and sing so well, beside paint and do lots of things I can't and then, she is generally so smooth and sort of—silky, you know, while I'm a burr, Thad, a regular burr!"

"Well, you may be a burr, Sue, perhaps you are, and Martha may paint and play better, but I guess there are plenty of reasons why the jealousy might be on Martha's side. Why, she can't hold a candle to you in singing, Sue, and as for being pretty," and Thad shamefacedly laid his hand on Sue's. "Why, she can't be named in the same day."

"Don't be a silly, Thad," snapped Sue, jerking her hand away and blushing to the roots of her hair. "I'm not pretty a bit, and I won't have you say so. You can let me go now, for I am over my maddest mad, and I shan't make a scene. Get up, please, you are sitting on my ruffles."

“But, Sue,” whispered Thad again, bending nearer. “I think you are the prettiest, jolliest girl I ever saw!”

“And I think you are the biggest goose this side the pond,” replied Sue saucily.

“I never saw such a girl,” growled Thad, angrily springing to his feet. “Here I have been tagging you around all evening, and most girls would have been grateful.”

“Oh, you have, have you? And that is what made Martha so hopping!” cried Sue, contemptuously. “Well, I’m not grateful a bit! Go talk to her like that; I don’t doubt she’ll think it fine. There goes Bruce Morris, I’ll go and dance with him.” But when she had skipped down the steps and glanced back to see Thad still standing there looking very red and angry, she flew back again and said, frankly holding out her hand:

“There, Thad, I like you awfully when you are nice and brotherly, as you usually are, and I need not have been so cross anyway, for you were lovely about Martha and kept me from making a goose of myself. Let’s be friends, only don’t put on frills and quirks with me, for it always either makes me want to laugh, or be dreadfully cross, and you don’t like either.”

Thad took her hand, though still nettled, and then said in a condescending tone that made Sue's eyes flash again:

"I forgot for the moment that in spite of your fifteen years you are nothing but a child."

"Fiddlesticks," sniffed Sue. "You are only two years older, so you needn't put on such airs. But I am not going to quarrel with anybody to-night, for I promised my mother I would try to keep my temper, so I'm going! Good-by, Thad."

"Good-by, little girl," said Thad, still too angry to resist this parting shot, and then turning he devoted himself assiduously to gentle little Avis, embarrassing her so she could not find a word to say, and she was relieved beyond measure when Sid came to bashfully claim her for a dance.

Meanwhile Sue had sought out Pink Morris to tell her tale of woe about Martha—she was wise enough not to mention her quarrel with Thad—for Pink had a very knowing head on her young shoulders.

"Don't pay any attention to it," advised that astute young person. "All that is the matter is, she wanted Thad Clayton trailing after her and he did n't trail! That is all in the world that ails her, Sue. She would have said

the same thing about Avis, or Fan, or me, if she had had the occasion."

"Goodness gracious!" groaned Sue. "Why, she'd have been as welcome to Thad as the flowers that bloom in the spring, tra-la!"

"You are a dear, Sue Roberts," said Pink softly, and then she suddenly leaned over and gave Sue a kiss. The kiss surprised Sue, and pleased her very much, for Pink was not given to caresses, and somehow under its loving influence Sue felt her anger and resentment melting away, and she was glad to notice Thad was dancing with Martha when she went to find Virginia to see if she could be of any use. She found Virginia in the midst of a merry game with the little folks, Mildred and Bruce helping her.

"O Sue," Virginia whispered, "I'm so glad you've come. You please take my place until I slip away to see if they are not nearly ready for us in the dining-room. Just think, Thad has promised to play on his violin! Is n't that fine?"

Sue, in her keen enjoyment of the "questions and answers," soon forgot all her troubles and was quite over her huff when the Japanese gong summoned them. Indeed she was so occupied she never saw Martha's glance of tri-

umph, as she sailed by on Thad's arm, for Martha and Albert had had a tiff, and he was consoling himself with kind little Avis.

And even if Sue had still felt angry with Thad she would have quite forgiven him when, after the merry supper, he slipped away to get his violin, and then, standing modestly in the arch, he played the "Gondoliera" with such expression and delicacy that music-loving Sue's eyes were filled with tears and her heart grew very tender toward the whole world.

Indeed, still under the influence of the music, as the girls once more trooped up to the dressing room for their wraps, she found it very easy to slip her hand through Martha's arm and say naturally and earnestly:

"I do hope, Martha, when we get to Hope Hall we will learn to know and understand each other better. I'm sure we will have lovely times there. Has n't Virginia's party been a great success?"

But Martha drew rather pettishly away, remarking it was very warm, and that she had torn her flounce, and lost her handkerchief, parties were always such bores. At school? Know each other better? Well, she expected to be very busy, as she was only going to Hope

Hall to prepare for an eastern school, and intended doing a great deal of study.

Up in the dressing room all was gaiety and clatter, for in spite of weariness, mussed gowns and wilted flowers, they had had a beautiful time, and all save Martha were in the best spirits.

Sue found a moment in the midst of the laughter and noise to say a word to Thad, as they stood waiting for the omnibus, and provoked as he had been with her, he had to think the girlish face, so bright-eyed and kindly, very attractive under its lace scarf.

"Please, Thad," she said, "I want to tell you how well I think you play. I enjoyed your music most of anything, Thad. It was very lovely."

Thad had missed her voice amid the enthusiastic praise that had greeted him, and somehow these simple words spoken out of a true appreciation meant a great deal, since Thad loved his music next to his science.

"Thank you, Sue," he said heartily. "And I hope you will pardon me if I hurt you in any way, for I would like to be your good friend, right along with Virginia, if I may."

"Indeed, indeed," whispered back Sue, her face all aglow, as it always was when she was

touched. "I am glad and proud to have you for my friend. It is only I don't like—"

"Frills and quirks," laughed Thad. "All right, we'll drop them. But you won't always be a little girl, Sue."

"Yes, I shall. I don't ever mean to grow up," she called back over her shoulder, as she went to Virginia for a last good-night.

A few moments later the old omnibus lumbered down the road, and back to the little group standing on the veranda steps, came floating until it died way in the distance:

"Good night, ladies,
We're going to leave you now."

CHAPTER XIII

HOPE HALL

THEY stood upon the broad stone steps, looking wistfully through the screen doors into the shadowy hall beyond. They could see girls strolling up and down, arm in arm, talking, laughing and now and then glancing with some curiosity in their direction. But no one came to admit them, though under Sue's impatient hand the bell more than once tinkled wildly, then died away in silence, leaving them gazing helplessly at each other.

"Well, of all things, this is the 'beatin'est,' as Mandy says!" gasped Sue, setting her traveling bag down on the step and taking a firmer hold upon the bell handle. "I believe we have struck an asylum for the deaf and dumb."

"It says Hope Hall on the door plate, anyway," replied Virginia, peering through the screen. "Oh, Sue, I do wish they would hurry, for I think I heard the tea bell just then, and I am starving. Are n't you?"

"Perfectly famished. Oh, at last!" she

sighed, as a colored boy in livery ran down the stairs at the end of the hall and came toward them. "They were waiting for the bellboy. How stupid of us not to think of it!"

"We wish to see Miss Hope," announced Virginia, giving the boy her card.

"You's some ob de new young ladies, I 'spects," said the boy, grinning and showing his gleaming teeth. "Walk right into the 'ception room, and I'll go an' tell Mis' Rood. Miss Hope, she won't be here 'til to-morrow. She done gone to New York," and taking their cards he hurried away, leaving the two girls in the big, quiet room, dusky and dim in the twilight. Through the stillness they could hear the quick tripping of girlish feet, a low spoken word, and now and then subdued laughter as some one passed the door.

"I never felt so funny in my life," whispered Sue, nestling closer to Virginia, as they sat stiff and prim on the big sofa, looking very little and forlorn in the gloom and strangeness of it all. "Sort of queer and all-overish."

"I know, that is the way you always feel at a new school," comforted Virginia, slipping an arm around her chum. It was usually Sue who was the brave one, but the day had been very hard on poor Sue; the wrench at leaving home



Betty Gung Page

"I NEVER FELT SO FUNNY IN MY LIFE," WHISPERED SUE.

had been much harder than she had anticipated. It had been so different, the pleasant talking and dreaming of going away, from the real leave-taking; kissing her mother for the last time, looking into her father's eyes—father so wan and worn in the early dawn of the September day—and then the saying good-by to the children. Even now as she thought of them a big lump came up in her throat. She felt she had disgraced herself beyond measure by crying half the day, but somehow the memory of their eight dear faces looking at her through the car window—for even Mandy had asked to see her off—took all the spring of joy out of her, and here was Virginia as brave as could be. But when Sue remarked about this difference, Virginia's bright face had instantly clouded and the dark eyes filled with tears.

“It is this way, you see,” she faltered. “Father and Thad have already sailed, Aunt Sibyl leaves for Washington next week. Why, even Toddlekins will be happier at Cherryfair with the children than at Kinikinnick, so who will miss me, or whom have I to leave? No place has seemed really like home since mamma is gone.”

But now they were at Hope Hall and the bell-boy was back again, picking up their travelling

bags and bidding them follow him. They went through the dusky hall, up the stairs, past long rows of numbered doors, some open, giving glimpses of dainty, girlish belongings, while here and there a girl hurried by giving them greeting with a smile and bow.

“Dey ain’t many ob de young ladies heah yet,” explained their guide, “but by Wednesday we’ll be runnin’ fine. Dis is Mis’ Rood’s sittin’ room; she ain’t in the office after fo’ o’clock.”

Mrs. Rood stood in the bay window looking with great interest at the two cards she held in her hand; one dainty and delicately engraved, the other written in little lame Jimmie’s most flourishing hand upon a yellowish card with beveled edges. She looked up with a smile as Sue and Virginia, in answer to her summons, opened the door.

Mrs. Rood was a large woman of perhaps sixty; her black silk gown and embroidered collar fastened with a jet brooch, and her fluffy white cap, with wide strings that floated out behind her as she came to welcome them, made a pleasant setting for her broad, calm face and double chin.

“I am sure,” said Mrs. Rood, in a full throaty voice, “this is Miss Virginia Clayton,

Professor Clayton's daughter," and she turned her smiling face toward Virginia. "And this, I presume, is Mrs. Fulton's niece, Miss Roberts. I don't think I understand the first name, S-I-O-U-X! How very odd and original," and she again studied intently Jimmie's flighty flourishes.

"Oh, you see," explained Sue, airily, "that's the way I spell it. My real name is Susan Plenty."

"Susan Plenty! Oh, I understand, S-I-O-U-X, Sue, to be sure. How very stupid of me, but, you see, I had never known of it being used as a name for a young lady. Ah, I see, I see," and Mrs. Rood was plainly amused as she laid aside the card. "And now," she said, "the second tea bell will ring immediately, so I am afraid I can give you but a moment to prepare. This way, please. Be as quick as you can, young ladies. You may sit with me for to-night at least." The tone was short and imperative, and the girls found themselves moving like soldiers to obey.

"She gives me the cold shivers," whispered Sue, as Mrs. Rood left them for a moment. "Did you see that look she gave me when I told her my real name?"

"Nonsense, Sue. I like her ever so much.

She is 'school marmy,' they all get like that, and so would you and I, if we were forever at it. But she is nice, and a lady, and I have had some I did not think were. Beside, she is n't the principal. It is Miss Hope I want to see. Is my hair all right?"

"Move your side comb over that way. There, that's fine! Bother, I can't do a thing with mine, but come along, honey." And Sue, with a last pat to her curly locks, opened the door, then two meek little maidens followed in the wake of the rustling black silk and the floating cap strings.

"I never felt so goody-goody in my life," breathed Sue softly from the corner of her mouth, scarcely moving a muscle of her face, and with her eyes set straight ahead as if she were in a trance. "I'm just ready to go up in a hand basket, and if you make me laugh at the table I shall stick you with my belt pin 'til you'll howl right out!"

"Sue Roberts, do behave!" breathed Virginia, also from the corner of her mouth, but gazing unwinkingly at the cap strings. "For goodness' sake, *please-e-e* don't cut up any capers to-night, and oh, Sue, don't make me laugh!"

"Virginia, I'm going to sneeze," came from

Sue's puckered lips, and she gripped Virginia's arm fiercely in pretended terror. "The roof will fly off if I do!"

"Sh-h-h, for mercy's sake." Virginia's eyes were fairly set in her head from trying not to laugh, and in dread of what Sue might take it in her flighty head to do. "Sh-h-h-h, she will hear you, Sue! Don't disgrace us both the very first night. Mercy be, here is the dining-room, I hear the dishes rattle. What a narrow escape!"

"Not many of our girls are back," remarked Mrs. Rood, turning her placid face toward them, as Virginia and Sue followed her down the room. "Most of them will arrive to-morrow. We wrote you to come to-day, as we like to get all the new girls settled before work begins. These two young ladies at my table also arrived to-day. Miss Carr and Miss Wills, I bring you two new friends, Miss Roberts and Miss Clayton."

Sue felt the lump return to her throat the very first glimpse she had of little Miss Wills. There was no doubt about Miss Wills, she was homesick already, and she did n't care who knew it. Her plain, freckled face was swollen with weeping, her pale blue eyes swimming with tears, and she was making ineffectual dabs at

the hot salt drops that insisted upon trickling down her scalded cheeks with a damp little wad of a handkerchief. Miss Carr, who proved to be Miss Wills's roommate—they had met in the reception room on their arrival, sworn eternal friendship in the first fifteen minutes, and already cordially hated each other—was a quiet gray-eyed girl, with a good deal of force of character in her square chin and firm mouth, and if she felt forlorn she showed no evidence of it, as she shook hands with Sue and Virginia. Miss Wills was too washed-out and limp with weeping to more than feebly nod, and Mrs. Rood, grown used to homesick girls during forty years of teaching, paid no attention to her dismal condition.

There were perhaps fifteen or eighteen girls scattered about the room, some of them sad and teary, but others, evidently old friends and glad to be together, for laughter and the pleasant murmur of voices drifted to Mrs. Rood's silent table. The happy laughter seemed so apart that Sue never felt more depressed in her life, what with Miss Wills's subdued sniffing, the lump in her own throat, the placid calm of Mrs. Rood's unsmiling face, which, in spite of the fluffy cap, was like the face of the statue of Buddha—just as serene and unapproachable—

why, one might as well be dead and buried as in such a dismal spot.

In after days, when the big dining-room had grown as dear and familiar as the sunny room at Cherryfair, Sue often thought of the gloom and heartsickness with which she regarded its dull red walls that night, the broad windows with their silk curtains, the great palm by the piano, the polished floor and many round tables, all so different from home.

“It is a beautiful room,” Virginia hastily whispered, seeing Sue’s lips quiver, “I know we shall love Miss Hope.”

What were they doing at home, Sue wondered, were they thinking of her? Were they—then a tear trickled out from under her lid and went sliding down her cheek.

“I am afraid you will never forgive me, Mrs. Rood, but I was so absorbed in my book I quite forgot tea. Oh, I hope you have something good for me, for I am as hungry as a hunter.”

It seemed to Sue that her tears evaporated at the very sound of that cheery, sunny voice, the lump in her throat vanished in a twinkling, the laugh that was usually in her heart sprang to her lips, her eyes shone and there was Miss Burns Gribble smiling at her—it was really a case of love at first sight.

It didn't make the least difference to Sue that the newcomer was too tall, and too thin, nor that the face was plain, and the gray eyes squinted back of the glasses, nor that she was no longer young. She hardly noticed the beautiful coils of red hair, nor the pretty white hands, nor the winsome smile, she only knew she had found a friend. Who can explain the subtle thing that draws us one to the other, that strange joy of comradeship? Sue, buoyant, wholesome Sue, didn't give a thought as to whether it was because their "auras blended," or because they were born under the same sign of the zodiac, she just accepted a new friend with all her impulsive heart and went on her way rejoicing.

"Our vocal teacher, Miss Gribble," said Mrs. Rood, her own face lighting, for she was fond of Burns Gribble—most people were—and the reason wasn't hard to find. With tactful choice she seated herself between Sue and little Miss Wills, turning a smiling face toward the one while her pretty white hand stole into the other girl's lap to find the poor little cold hand with the damp ball in it, the gentle pressure of that kind hand had seemed to say "poor little girl, I understand." Then there was a brilliant flash of a smile toward Virginia, and a

quick friendly nod to Alice Carr, and the silent weebegone table was galvanized into hope and joy again, and life was absolutely worth living.

“First nights are always so horrid,” declared Miss Gribble in a vibrant whisper that included them all in an intimate friendship. “I can remember just how I felt. But, girls, we are going to have the most beautiful time of our lives this year, I just feel it! Don’t you, Mrs. Rood? And after tea we are going to get those two new girls over at that table, and those two over there, and that one by the window, and I’m going to sing you the jolliest little coon song you ever heard, and then we are all going to get our hats and walk out to see the moon come up over the river. Pshaw, first nights can’t last for ever!”

By this time every one was smiling; even Miss Wills sent a watery little gleam toward Miss Gribble. In ten minutes more Miss Gribble had them all in a gale of glee—Mrs. Rood breaking into low chuckles now and then—as she told them of her youngest nephew’s pranks, of her vacation and the delights of all sorts that had been hers during the summer.

“Let me see,” she said at last. “Aren’t you two girls, Miss Roberts and Miss Clayton, from Monroe? Then I believe there is another

girl coming from your town, is there not? I met her aunt in Dexter this summer, a Miss Curtis, or something like that. Am I not right?"

"Oh yes, Martha Cutting," replied Virginia, a little smile, in spite of herself, curling her lips, for Martha had refused to come so early, saying she didn't care to arrive with the mob but wanted to make a dignified entrance. "She will not be here until Thursday."

"That is a pity," remarked Mrs. Rood, "as all the best rooms will be taken and the best hours chosen for practice. You came at the very best time, my dears."

"The early bird catches the worm at Hope Hall, you see, as everywhere else," laughed Miss Gribble. "Are either of you to be one of my girls? You look as if you were musical."

"I shall have piano, but Sue sings beautifully," replied Virginia with a gesture of pride toward Sue.

"And you two are the greatest friends, I can see that. Well, I have Miss Carr and Miss Wills on one side of me, and Mrs. Rood, if you don't mind, I should like to take these two chicks under my other wing. That room next mine with the bay window is empty, and, you know, I always like to choose my neighbors."

“Oh, may we?” cried both girls at once, looking up with such pleading eyes that Mrs. Rood nodded indulgently.

It was with entirely different feelings the girls climbed the long stairs the second time. Then they were strangers, in a strange land, now they had a friend and a room, and even if they had never seen the room it was sure to seem homelike with this cheery presence near.

“Is n’t she bully?” whispered Sue to Alice Carr as they ascended the stair together. Virginia was on one side of their divinity, while Miss Wills still clung to that rescuing hand as if she were afraid she might drown in the flood of her own tears should she let go.

“She is a lovely lady,” replied Miss Carr a bit stiffly, though she had taken Sue’s arm a moment before. “I hardly think I should describe her as bully!”

Sue bit her lip over this most unlucky blunder and decided in her headlong way that Alice Carr was a prig, and that she was n’t going to like her, but just then Miss Gribble paused before a door marked 21 and said cheerily:

“Well, my dears, here you are at home.”

CHAPTER XIV

GETTING ACQUAINTED

THE sun was streaming into the big, bare, bay window, when Sue roused by the jangle of a bell opened her sleepy eyes. Slowly the feeling of strangeness stole over her drowsy senses and she sat up dazed and winking.

Virginia upon her knees before her trunk lifted a laughing, rosy face from its depths as she heard Sue stirring.

“Good morning, sleepy girl,” she said gaily, “I’ve been up and dressed an hour. But you don’t need to hurry, that was only the rising bell.”

“Goodness gracious, child,” gasped Sue. “Why didn’t you say something? I didn’t want to miss a moment of *really* being here! What is the reason that stockings always will be wrong side out when you are in the biggest hurry?”

“Oh, Sue, we are the luckiest girls, the view from our window is over the river and it is beautiful. It was so kind of Miss Gribble to

get this room for us. You know it is only empty because some senior decided not to come back."

"Blessings on the senior, and oh, won't Martha be hopping when she gets here and finds she's left! Isn't it the biggest old joke. She was so high and mighty when she said that about not caring to arrive with the 'mob.' Won't it be fun to see her in some dinky little back room!"

"I . . . don't . . . know . . . " said Virginia, slowly sinking back upon the floor and clasping her hands about her knees. "I didn't mean to tell you, Sue, but . . . you see, I really do like Martha, and even if I didn't . . . I knew she would feel horrid to come and have some unpleasant room . . . when I was here and might have helped . . . I asked Mrs. Rood last night to please arrange it. She said it was unusual, but at last she consented, and while you were singing for Miss Gribble I chose a room I am sure Martha will like. You don't care, Sue?"

"Care!" cried Sue, tumbling down in a heap beside Virginia. "Care, you precious! Yes, I care! and a lot more than care! To think I am the one to forget so quickly what father and mother are always trying to teach me, and you

to remember! I'm glad, Virginia! I truly am!"

"And you don't think I'm trying to act goody-goody?" whispered Virginia with her head on Sue's shoulder. "I really . . . yes, I thought it would be lots of fun to see her dismay when I first thought of it, but really . . . "

"But really this is a hundred times better. I'm not going to say I love Martha, I may some time, but I don't now, but I'm glad I did n't get a chance to act mean."

"And you don't think . . . "

"That you are trying to preach to me? Not a bit of it! But goodness, I've got to hurry, or I'll get my head taken off the very first day!"

Virginia and Sue—Sue very jaunty in her dyed jacket—opened their door at the first tap of the breakfast bell.

"Good morning, dicky birds, on time, I see," came in a cheery voice from Miss Gribble's open door. "One moment and I will go with you. Ah, here is Miss Carr and Miss Wills," went on Miss Gribble, coming out just as the two girls appeared. "I notice we never have any lazy girls the first morning. I hope you all slept well. This is going to be a glorious day. Good morning, good morning!"



BECKY GILL'S PAGE

VIRIGNIA AND SUE OPENED THEIR DOOR AT THE FIRST
TAP OF THE BREAKFAST BELL.

The girls were appearing from all directions now and trooping together down the broad stairway, and it was pretty to see how each face brightened at Miss Gribble's greeting.

"Good morning, young ladies. Good morning!" said a black-eyed, white-haired little woman, who, standing just inside the dining-room with Mrs. Rood, offered her hand to the girl nearest her.

"Why, Miss Hope!" cried the girl. It was May Price, one of the older girls to whom Sue had taken a great fancy the night before. "Why, Miss Hope, when did you arrive? We had n't an idea you would be with us for breakfast!"

"Ah, my dears," said Miss Hope, and catching her gown up daintily on either side she made a gay, sweeping courtesy to the whole group. "Did you really think I would let you get on without me? I surprised our good Mrs. Rood at the midnight hour that I might have the pleasure of breakfasting with you. How do you do, Miss Gribble. Ah, here are Miss Sargent, Miss White, Miss Decker and Fraulein Prather. Now all our teachers are here, except Miss Childs and our new teacher, Miss Thaw, who will arrive to-day. We are all going to do exceptional work after our long

vacation, I am sure. After breakfast I shall expect to meet the young ladies in my offices. Miss Decker, I will take breakfast at your table, with your permission. I have not quite decided upon my guests for the year."

"Oh, Miss Hope, *please!*" cried a dozen of the older girls beseechingly.

Miss Hope laughed and waving them a gay denial took Miss Decker's arm and crossed the room.

"You see," said May Price to Sue, "it is considered a very great privilege to sit at Miss Hope's table. But you new girls must n't think she is always gay like that. My, just wait until you see those black eyes flash and that little figure stiffen up, and if you don't feel like creeping under the sofa you are a braver girl than I am!"

"Is n't she kind?" asked Virginia.

"Oh, so-so," replied May, shrugging her shoulders. "She's strong on discipline, and somewhat capricious, I think, but most of the girls adore her."

As the girls filed into the office that morning it seemed to Sue that her heart had never beaten so hard nor so fast in her life. Among the new girls she and Virginia were the first called.

Miss Hope sat in her swivel chair before her desk. Sue felt those black eyes saw and understood every fault within and without. She drew a long breath as the thought flashed through her mind that her stockings were new and her skirt freshly bound, and every button upon her shoes, but the knowledge that in her hurry she had torn the lace at her throat and had to pin it together caused a quick blush to rise to her cheeks.

“So this is Miss Virginia Clayton,” said Miss Hope, offering her hand to Virginia. “You have a father to be proud of, my dear, and I hope you will do your best to make him proud of you. Miss Sargent, whom you will see in the library, will attend to your classes and standings. Mrs. Rood tells me you have been given a room and roommate, and Miss Gribble has asked that both you and your roommate be placed at her table, and as long as you are both good I have no objection. And this is Susan Roberts, Mrs. Fulton’s niece. My dear, I first knew your aunt when she was Serena Roberts, the prettiest, liveliest girl at Madam Whitney’s academy. I think she was the veriest madcap I ever knew.”

“Aunt Serena!” gasped Sue in astonishment, in spite of her fear of Miss Hope. “Aunt

Serena a madcap! Why, I supposed she was a regular woolly lamb! She is always giving me Hail Columbia for every old thing I do!"

It was Virginia's turn to gasp now, although Miss Hope made no reply to Sue's startling speech, except a sharp glance, but turning to her desk she searched a moment for a letter which she looked over hastily.

"Yes, I see, I see," she remarked. "I had almost forgotten. Well, you see, Miss Roberts, as one grows older there often takes place a great change in character, in mind and manner just as there does in appearance, or else all our teaching, studying, working and praying would be for naught. I am glad you two girls are to be together. Miss Sargent is waiting for you now and will attend to your placing,"—she dismissed them with an imperative wave of her hand and a keen smile that lightened her face without warming it. May Price was right, thought Sue, she could hardly believe this was the gay little figure with the sweeping courtesy.

"What do you think of her, Virginia?" asked Sue, as the two girls passed out and walked down the hall toward the library. "Aren't you surprised? She isn't a bit as

I expected from those violet letters. I would n't care to get on the wrong side of her."

"She is the most distinguished-looking small woman I ever saw, Sue. There are moments when she is beautiful. She is n't at all like any teacher I have ever had, but I like her ever so much. When you said that awful thing about your Aunt Serena, though, I almost sank, for I expected to see you dragged off to a dungeon, but she never seemed to hear it."

"She heard it all right, honey, don't you doubt that, I felt a shiver down my spine the moment those words left my lips, and those black eyes said something, I couldn't quite make out, but it meant that it would be 'all day with Susie' if she did n't be good. But, all the same I liked her, Virginia. She's the sort you can tie to."

"Well," cried May Price, skipping down the hall after them. "Did you fall under the Prexie's spell? Isn't she fine! Frightened you out of your wits, I suppose, poor little firsties! I feel for you deeply. I will admit I was trying to frighten you this morning, but she certainly is a Tartar if you once rouse her and let her know you don't intend to study, or be what she calls a 'tru-u-u-r woman.' I'd rather have Miss Hope call me a 'tru-u-

u-r woman' than be knighted. But I never expect it, for that only comes to a very select few."

"Pets?" inquired Sue.

"No-o-o," mused May. "You couldn't tell the truth and say Elizabeth Hope has pets. She is the sort you can win only by your inward grace. Oh, you can't beg, buy, borrow, nor even steal your way into her favor! I have seen every one of those ways tried, too. You can get there by just one route, namely, to earn it, and I'm here to tell you the way is long and stony. She is slow, but she's sure, and there isn't any mothering in her, not a mite, for all she is so little, and pretty, and almost girlishly gay at times; so don't be expecting any sloppings-over."

"Any one can see that," assented Sue. "But I like her just the same."

"She has a mind like a man," went on May. "My, wait until you are in one of her classes, and then if you aren't enthusiastic it is because you can't appreciate a good teacher. It is wonderful to hear her weigh and balance and decide a question. But it is always discipline with a large D, and she never errs on the side of mercy, let me tell you. The best way to get on with her 'is never to let her strike

a first discordant note in you, then you are safe to have your melody at Hope Hall sweep on in sweetest harmony!" " chuckled May, making quotation marks on both sides of her blooming face by snapping her fingers. "Don't think for a moment I was smart enough to get up that delicious epigram, that's a bit from Anne Demuth, who was graduated last year. Poor Anne, her melody did any thing but sweep, but she was great fun, and didn't the feathers fly when she and Miss Hope met in the arena. But now you are going to meet the real mother of Hope Hall. Miss Sargent is charming, good and dear, and everybody loves her."

The whole day came out beautifully, Sue told Virginia that night as she stood brushing her curls before her mirror. Miss Sargent had been very kind, and by a little extra study Sue would be able to enter the same classes with Virginia, except that while Virginia had third year French Sue was just beginning. Then Miss Gribbles' table was the merriest in the dining-room and the girls were so friendly and nice.

"I just love that Enid Fenno at our table. Don't you, Virginia?"

"You see, Sue, I never get acquainted as quickly as you do," yawned Virginia. "Ugh,

but I am sleepy. I did like May Price though and that little Miss Crum. Didn't you?"

"That Crum girl! Oh, Virginia, I just detested her."

"Now, Sue, you know you don't mean that. Did you notice her lovely eyes, and she said such kind things of every one."

"So ho, Missy, I caught you that time. The reason you didn't feel acquainted with Enid is because she is such a dandy gossip, but she is awfully funny and she can talk Irish as if she came from Cork. Did you notice the empty chair at Miss Decker's table right behind me?"

"Yes, I did, and Miss Crum said it was for Miss Dempsy of Kentucky."

"And oh Virginia, Enid says she is a regular cracker-jack of a girl. Her name is Nancy Jane Dempsy and all the girls call her Nancy Jancy Dempsy. Isn't that fun? And they say she is so awfully brilliant at her lessons that Miss Hope puts up with her, though she gives her particular fits once a week and does not trust her at all. Oh, it has been a lovely day, but, oh . . . and oh, . . . I would . . . like . . . to . . . see . . . Masie and . . . little . . . Ben." And Sue's voice trailed away in a half sob.

“Poor old Sue,” comforted Virginia, as she turned out the gas and raised the window shade.

“See, dear, there is the same old moon that is shining just as kindly on Cherryfair.”

“The same God is caring for us just as lovingly too,” sighed Sue, “I must not forget that.” And the gentle moon smiled down benignly on the two little white gowned figures that knelt side by side.

CHAPTER XV

THE OWLS AND THE DOVES

“**W**HAT is she like?” asked Nan, who had just gotten herself into her bedragoned kimona, tucked her feet into Turkish slippers, stuck a fez a-top her saucy head and was now perched on her biggest trunk, where she sat thumping her heels against it to the tune of Dixie. She had not been in the Hall an hour, but her faithful henchmaids had gathered from the uttermost parts to her room, and swarmed over the floor, and bed and window seat.

“Do stop that devil’s tattoo, Nan, if you don’t want Mrs. Rood rushing in here,” cried Enid Fenno, tossing a cushion with such unerring aim that Nancy had to duck dangerously to one side. “Well, I should say that Number 21 is out of the question. Virginia Clayton, judging from the few words she has deigned to address to your humble servant, is rich, refined and awfully affected by the rarified air of the cultured East. She shows it in the tilt of

her head, the set of her skirts, and the height of her heels, to say nothing of her not having an R to bless herself. I can tell you, right here, she'll have no use for the Screech Owls. So just count her out."

"Umph, don't want her!" sniffed Nan contemptuously. "The Mourning Doves can have her, and welcome. But how about her roommate?"

Nancy Jane Dempcy was hardly what you would expect from her quaint old-fashioned name, for from the tassel of her fez to the tips of the turned-up toes of her slippers she was a bundle of mischief and vivacity. Miss Hope said openly that she had given her more trouble than any girl she had ever had in the Hall, but then, too, she was perhaps the most brilliant mentally and the most vividly alive. She was absolutely fearless, with little idea of honor, except that one should rather die than tell upon a fellow sinner, and she was never happy except when engaged in some mad prank. Being the only child of one of the trustees of the school, petted, indulged and worshiped for her prettiness, her brilliancy, and her mad spirits it was perhaps no wonder that the girls inclined toward insubordination flocked around her, for with Nancy's wits at work upon a plot

it was apt to be carried through, and with her courage to defend, one was apt to escape one's just punishment. Beside, there was always something going on where Nan was; few dull moments were passed in her society and her room was always overflowing with girls.

Nan was founder and president of a musical, literary and social club called the Screech Owls, and, as she expressed it, every man's hand was against it and its hand against every man. The initiation of the Owls was made as blood curdling as Nan's vivid imagination could conjure and the constitution consisted of but one article: "Torture and death ere aught shall be divulged against any Owl."

Much to the girls' astonishment Miss Hope had made no objection to the forming of this club; in fact, she had expressed her entire approbation of it. Perhaps their astonishment would have given place to chagrin had they known her reason.

"It is a very good thing, indeed," she had remarked to Mrs. Rood. "In this way we shall find at the beginning of the term just who will fight under Nancy's banner. If the foolish things only knew it, it is a natural division of the goats from the sheep, and their taking matters into their own hands only simplifies the

question and makes my work that much easier. My Mourning Doves are safe, my Screech Owls will bear watching. Indeed, Mrs. Rood, I am very much obliged to Nancy for her really brilliant idea."

At the year's beginning the new girls were at once talked over by both clubs and decided upon, although this was unnecessary as the girls really found their places by natural gravitation.

The "Mourning Doves" had been renamed by the Screech Owls, their euphonious choice of "Utilian" being laughed to scorn by the impertinent Owls and for some unknown reason the derisive nickname had been accepted by the girls themselves. It is needless to say that all the best students were among the Doves, and it was daring rather than scholarship, with the exception of Nancy, that kept the Screech Owls up to the passing mark.

Nan always made a point of getting back to Hope Hall at the last possible moment, feeling her advent made more of splash in the pool than if she arrived quietly with the rest. She was fully a week late and the classes had settled down to their accustomed work. But the news of her return had flown as if by magic from room to room, from class to class, and at the

first tap of the noon rest bell the girls went flying down the hall to Number 14 to greet their chief.

Sue had stood at her door and looked a bit wistfully after Enid Fenno who had whispered hurriedly as she passed:

“Nan’s back. Now look out for gay old times,” and then had sped away, following the trail of a dozen other laughing girls, who were scuttling along for “dear life,” as if their leader might disappear if not promptly visited by her worshipers.

“My,” thought Sue with a sigh, “it must be lovely to be the leader of a lot of girls like that.”

And so now the gay queen of the Screech Owls sat upon her throne gathering information about her possible future subjects.

“Sue Roberts, she spells herself S-I-O-U-X, is all that that spelling would indicate,” explained Enid, leaning her head comfortably against Maze Wood’s knee. Enid had a certain shrewd ability in reading character that made her of immense use to Nancy. “Not that Sue is an Indian,” went on Enid, “but she is the sort of girl who would be up to tricks of that sort. She is original, slangy and a tomboy. She sings with what Miss Gribble calls



THE GAY QUEEN OF THE SCREECH OWLS SAT.
UPON HER THRONE.



‘quality’—whatever that means—it’s one of those rich, velvety contraltos that makes a lump come in your throat, but that you wish would keep right on doing it, so she would do the Owls a lot of good in our musicals this year. She is pretty, with a sort of dashy style; poor, I should judge, though she has an elegant tepee fixed up in her room and a lot of fine Indian things. She is a pretty fair student, talks a lot, and is as wild as a hawk in one way, but I don’t think she will ever make a Screech Owl.”

Immediately a shriek of protest went up from the other girls. Sue Roberts not make a Screech Owl! Why, from the very first day when she had slid down the banisters, danced a war dance in the gym. and dubbed Miss Thaw, the new teacher, a ‘Jerry Sneak,’ the Owls had marked her for their own, and they had just been waiting to hear Enid give Sue’s chief characteristics that Nan might know what an exceptional Owl had been awaiting her arrival, and now Enid Fenno by one fell swoop had settled the matter, for Enid’s opinion always went a great way with Nan.

“Why, Nan!” Maze Wood had fairly to scream to make herself heard over the clatter of protests, threats, denouncements and explanations that were taking place, “Sue

Roberts is one of the jolliest, funniest girls you ever saw. She isn't afraid of anybody or anything, and she told Ray Hurst that if Martha Cutting, another new girl who came from the same town, is going to be a dove she'd rather be a buzzard than be one. Miss Cutting is a sure enough Dove, she is thick as hops with Miss Thaw already, one of those girls who always has an arm around a teacher, a silky-pretty-low-voiced-sweet-smiler sort of a girl, awfully stuck on herself and her attainments. So Sue will have to belong to us, besides every one of us has invited her."

Nan frowned at this, she felt the girls had taken a good deal upon themselves as she never allowed them to forget she was president, or she the "Tommy Owl" and they the "Owlets," as Enid grumbled sometimes. Beside, she felt from what the girls said she would prefer to see Sue Roberts herself before she was admitted, and even if Enid had not pronounced against her, she knew that already Sue had strongly attracted them and there was no room among the Owls for two leaders. She would wait and see, but in the meantime it would be as well to find out every thing possible.

"Do hush up!" she cried, hammering on the

lid of her trunk with her cut glass inkstand. "Halt! Clear the decks! Sub rosa! Or any old thing! I never can think of any parliamentary language when I want it! What do you say, Enid, when you want people to shut up while you talk yourself?"

"Come to order," laughed Enid. "But you will have to have something better than that inkstand as a gavel. Here I'll hammer on this radiator with the shoe brush."

So by dint of noise and command the girls were at last quiet enough to hear all Enid had to say.

"Well," she went on calmly, "I did n't expect to bring such a hornet's nest about my ears by my simple remarks, but I think that very fact proves my point. In a club like this you can have only one real leader, or the first you know there will be 'feelings' then 'sides,' and by and by a regular breaking of the ranks and a stampede. 'In union there is strength' ought to be our motto, and if we get to quarreling we are going to get caught before the term is out—Miss Hope always has her eye on us. Sue Roberts is a born leader and so is Nan. You just let her go among the Doves and if the feathers are n't flying before a week I'll treat you all to fudge. I don't think Helen

is pining to have Sue in her club either; for she will be turned down and Sue elected president inside a month. Not that Sue is pushing, nor anxious, nor anything of that sort, but she's bound to rise, like a cork. Beside she has principles, with the whole word in capitals. She may, and will, break rules, but she will choose her rule; while she would be loyal to the death she might get stubborn at the most important moment; in other words, as I heard her express herself to Miss Sargent about her geometry, she is 'hot stuff' and we'd better let her alone."

"Enid always thinks she is so smart!" grumbled Maze, "but I'd like to know what poor Sue will do if she won't be a Dove and can't be an Owl?"

Enid shrugged her shoulders in a manner she considered very French.

"I'm sure I don't know," she said, "but I don't think it would have made any difference if we invited her, she would n't join us anyway. She thinks she would now, but Virginia Clayton has a lot of influence over her. I never saw better friends, and Virginia don't believe in us. That's all."

So it was settled, after much discussion, that the three girls from Monroe were not to be called to the high estate of Screech Owls.

Enid Fenno was mistaken about the Doves, for Sue received in the same house mail with Virginia and Martha a pretty little invitation to join the "Utilian . . . the most noted literary, musical and social club in Hope Hall." But, to the Doves' astonishment, Martha alone accepted, and then came the dumfounding news that Hope Hall was to have a new club.

Just before study hours one Friday morning Sue was seen carrying a stepladder along the halls. She had been so hilarious and excited at breakfast that even lenient Miss Gribble had had to reprove her, and Miss Hope's black eyes had flashed several threatening glances in her direction. Quite a train of little girls tagged after her as she bore the ladder away, for like Betty and Peggy they had already recognized Sue's unexpectedness. They worshipped her for stopping to play with them now and then, while Nan Dempsy and the Owls declared all small girls tattle-tales, and banished them from their presence, and Helen Campbell and her set were too superior usually to be bothered by little folks, so Sue was fast becoming their idol.

"What are you going to do, Miss Roberts?" little Dolly Bates inquired, eagerly running along by Sue's side. "Shall I help you? Our

school does n't begin 'til nine, you know."

"You help, you lady bird!" laughed Sue. "Why you could n't lift a rose leaf; but, never mind, you may lift a weeny-teeny bit if it will make you any happier. Here comes Virginia; she will help."

With Virginia's aid the ladder was soon carried upstairs and into 21, and then to the disappointment of the little girls the door was closed and they were no wiser than they were before. Still hoping to find out something of Sue's plans they hung about the hall, skipping about on their tiptoes in their frantic desire to know what was going to happen next. Some of the restless ones soon gave up, but Dolly and her roommate, Faith Rankin, perched themselves on a radiator just opposite Sue's door and were soon rewarded for their patience.

On each door at Hope Hall just above the number was a small pane of frosted glass through which the teachers and monitors were able to discover if the lights were out promptly at ten. Upon most of these panes, names, dates and various sentiments had been scratched, but, fortunately for Sue's purpose, that of 21 was unmarred, and now, to the great delight of the little watch-

ers, Sue, seated upon the stepladder inside the room, was cutting through the frosting—slowly, for she was forced to write backward—the astonishing legend, “The Minnehaha Club,” while beneath in smaller letters on one side was “Pale Face,” and on the other “Sioux, heap big Injun!”

Here was news indeed! Away flew the little girls to carry it, knowing by past experience that even primary pupils are welcomed by the big girls if they bear unexpected tidings.

To both Helen Campbell and Nancy Dempcy was this news most unwelcome. Neither leader cared for another rival and moreover a rival with the fascinations possessed by Sue. Helen, who was a dear girl, and much loved by the Doves, could not help feeling that Sue would offer far more original and interesting affairs than she could hope to, and Nan knew already that many of the more timid Owls would feel safer under Sue’s banner than under hers; for after three weeks most of the girls knew that, in spite of Sue’s rollicking and slang, Enid had been right, Sue had principles, and strong ones.

“Who will join?” was upon everybody’s lips. “What will Miss Hope say?” But Miss Hope fairly shook with laughter when Miss Thaw told her.

“Another weeding out,” she said. “How the dear things help me with their follies! I really dreaded Sue’s fascinations and abundant energy. I did not at all want her with Nancy, and now see, she has placed herself exactly under my microscope. Dear me, if I had planned it I could hardly have invented a better way, and I believe I could write a list of the girls who will flock around her—Helen’s gayest ones, and Nan’s best ones. It is only Virginia Clayton who does not fit, and she will stay for love of Sue. Well, well, Miss Thaw, this is very good news! Very good news, indeed!”

But Miss Thaw had not brought it for good news, and she did not at all approve of her chief’s way of accepting it.

Miss Vashti Edna Thaw had never taught in a girl’s school before, and she was considered a very strict disciplinarian. Her long, narrow face, her sharp nose, her small blue eyes set closely together, her jerky movements and shrill voice were not prepossessing, and yet there was not a girl in her classes who did not grow enthusiastic about her as a teacher.

“Call her Thaw!” groaned Nan Dempcy, after the first day. “Why, she’s a regular frost! The very minute she set those little blue

eyes on me, I felt the Screech Owls had better hoot pretty low while she's around; but all the same, I never had such a teacher, not even excepting Miss Hope. Why, Enid, Annette Stone positively raised her head and took notice. She did, she did! I know it sounds like a dream, but, goodness me, a donkey would have listened. The way Miss Thaw translated that page of Virgil was something worth hearing. It left me perfectly breathless. Did n't that dry-as-dust glow and sparkle? And did n't one just ache to go and do likewise? As a teacher Vashti Edna is a bright, particular star; as a person she is *impossible*."

And this seemed to be the general verdict, for, with the exception of Miss Decker, whom she had known before, and Martha Cutting, she seemed to have no friends, even the other teachers finding her cold and severe. Of Nancy Dempsy and Sue Roberts, Miss Thaw had disapproved from the first, and she said openly that if she were in Miss Hope's place the Owls would not be tolerated for a moment, and now it seemed beyond belief that another club was to be allowed, whose purpose, in her eyes, was plainly mischief, and when she heard Miss Hope's laughing approval, and understood that

nothing was to be done to crush the Minnehahas, she closed the door after her with what in a pupil she would have called most unladylike force, and sailed down the hall with her lips set in a hard, straight line.

J.H.S.

CHAPTER XVI

TROUBLE IN NUMBER 21

ALTHOUGH Sue was unanimously elected chief of the "Hahas," as the Owls at once dubbed the members of the new club, it was really Virginia's idea.

Lessons had settled down to smooth running, practice hours were falling into regular lines, days were beginning to flow along as school days should, study hours in their place, recitations in theirs, rules in theirs, and fun spread in like jelly between layers of cake, but still Sue and Virginia were what Nancy called unclubbed. It was n't especially noticeable, as neither the Owls nor the Doves had had time for any open meetings, the first of the year is always such a busy time, but Sue had heard rumors of forbidden feasts, of fudge-making and chafing-dish messes that had set her all a-twitter to display her skill.

Number 21 had many callers, for news of its unusualness had soon spread through Hope

Hall, and each girl had wished to see its beauties for herself.

Sue and Virginia had thoroughly enjoyed making their room as homelike and artistic as possible. Together they had draped their bay window with the soft red silk Virginia had brought from Kinikinnick; they had tacked up the Indian prints, the bows and arrows, and papoose cases, thanking their lucky stars for the plain red wall paper that made such an excellent background; spread the Navajo blanket over their divan and heaped it with red and russet pillows; hid their bed back of the dull red canvas screen, upon which Virginia had roughly drawn Hopi designs of Thunder-birds, Man-eagles, and flights of queer wild geese in gray-greens, indigo-blues and "warm browns." There were the peace-pipes, the feather bonnets and the fringed leggins, that dangled from the picture railing with the bead bags, moccasins and the strings of wampum, and last and best, the picturesque tepee was set up in the corner, such an interesting tepee, with its brownness made gay by the swollen rain clouds, the yellow suns and blue thunder bolts the Indians had painted upon it. Within the charmed interior Virginia had set her pretty little tabouret, and the double-handled copper kettle, the red cups,



THEY HAD TACKED UP THE INDIAN PRINTS.

yellow cracker jar and dusky little green teapot, for, as Sue hastened to explain to their guests:

“If Indians don’t have tea tables, they ought to, so we’ll go them one better.”

Miss Gribble had been pleased as one of the girls over the picturesque prettiness of it all. Mrs. Rood and kind Miss Sargent had drunk a cup of tea with them, and even Miss Hope had stepped in for a moment to compliment them for their originality, and it was over all this pleasant kindness that Virginia and Sue had their first tiff, the little rift within the lute that might, if they were not careful, make all the music of their girlish friendship mute.

Virginia was sitting at the table one evening, just after study hour bell, toiling away at her French translation, while Sue, curled up among the pillows on the divan, was supposed to be industriously conning her Latin verbs, when suddenly she gave such a heavy sigh that the divan fairly creaked under it.

“Why, poor old Sue! What is the matter?” inquired Virginia, dropping her pen in dismay. “Are you homesick, or can’t you get your conjugations?”

“Homesick? Oh, I am always that. Would n’t I give my head to see the whole lot of them to-night! But that is n’t what’s the matter

with Susie, and it is n't verbs. The truth is, honey, I sighed, as Ben would say, 'a-purpose.' I wanted to talk to you, and, you know, I promised not to speak. Gracious, I'm glad I don't have to sigh like that often!"

"O Sue, won't it keep?" pleaded Virginia, looking longingly at her Fontaine. "This fable is so interesting, and Miss Hope is coming tomorrow to recitation, and I do want to make a good translation."

"It won't take a minute, really, Virginia," assured Sue, drawing her feet up under her comfortably. "It's about a club. Enid Fenno says Nancy Jancy Dempsy has decided that she don't care to have us as Owls, which is as well, since we would neither of us be caught being one."

"No, I suppose not, as they are always breaking rules, and I suppose their not wanting us is really a compliment, but Miss Gribble says some of their entertainments are splendid."

"That is all right, but I don't want any Dempsy in mine. I said 'tommy rot' before Nan the other day, and she pretended she could n't understand me, and, after she had gotten me to repeat it two or three times, she said she did n't speak the language and asked if it was dead; of course, the girls almost died

laughing, you know they just stand around waiting for her to speak, but I told her I guessed she had n't read her Kipling to very good purpose."

"What did she say to that?"

"That if I had n't brought anything better away from my Kipling than that she would advise another course—sassy thing!"

"Well, it's true, Sue, please don't feel hurt," and Virginia picked up her pen, "but if one brings away only the slang and uncouthness from a book it is better not read."

Sue frowned for an instant, and then shook her head, much as Toddlekins used to when he wished to get rid of a fly. She did n't intend to quarrel with Virginia, so she would not reply to any dangerous remark like that.

"Well, anyhow," she said at last, just as Virginia had found her place in the dictionary. "I think you might talk it over with me."

"All right," and Virginia, submissively putting the stopper in her ink bottle, pushed back her chair and folded her hands meekly in her lap.

"Oh, shucks!" snapped Sue, burrowing her head in the cushions, "I don't care to talk to a miserable martyr."

“It seems to me, Sue, you are rather hard to please;” Virginia’s tone had unmistakably cooled. “If you prefer I can go back to my work.”

“There, there, lambie, don’t get huffy,” laughed Sue, appearing from the cushion’s depth, disheveled and repentant, “I’m a regular patch to-night, but the truth is, I’m boiling over at Martha Cutting. She’s a regular sneak cat, and in spite of promises to Masie and vows to you, I can’t get on with her.”

“Why, I think she seems very nice to you now, Sue. She said our room was so pretty, and told you what Miss Gribble said of your voice, and was just as pleasant as any girl that called.”

“Yes, and ran right off to Enid and said she would as soon live in a curiosity shop, and when Enid said she thought it very artistic in coloring, Martha said: ‘Oh, that is Virginia; Sue Roberts has n’t any more taste than a savage.’ And afterward she said my voice sounded like a chicken-hawk’s.”

“Enid Fenno was very unkind to repeat it to you. I would let that girl alone, if I were you, Sue.”

“I like her,” said Sue, her chin turning up

obstinately. "Your true friends always tell you all the mean things they hear about you, so you can protect yourself."

"Nonsense, Sue!" protested Virginia. "Then why did n't you tell me Nancy Dempcy said I was a stuck-up Yankee? You heard it, did n't you?"

"Why, who told you, Virginia?" cried Sue, sitting up in dismay. "I hoped you would n't hear that, I was afraid it would hurt you."

"Foolish old Sue," laughed Virginia, "So you are n't my true friend. Oh, Enid Fenno told me that, just as she tells all the other bits of disagreeable news she can gather. I did not care, for I knew if Nan could say that, she simply did n't know me."

"My me, what kind of girls are there here, anyway?" sighed Sue. "Nan and Enid and Martha—"

"Girls are the same, I suppose, all the world over. I am sure most of the girls here are lovely, and we don't need to rush into any new friendships. Let's wait a bit and see. But please, Sue, do hurry and say what you want to about the club, the evening is going and I have n't two lines translated."

"Well, then, I won't be a Dove and I can't be an Owl, and that's all!"

“Then there is only one thing to do—start a club for yourself!”

“What—did—you—say?” shrieked Sue, springing to the floor.

“Get up a club yourself,” repeated Virginia, with a careless laugh. “Is that so very dreadful of me? It might be an Indian club, you know.”

Sue had not stopped to listen, but was performing her own particular war dance, silently, but with such vigor that her hair was tumbling to her shoulders before she dropped in a breathless heap at Virginia’s feet.

“You precious old darling!” she panted. “It’s the finest idea going, and I never even thought of it. An Indian club, of course, with sun dances, buffalo hunts and scalping parties. Oh, joy be! and I named it while I danced—it’s ‘The Minnehaha.’ ”

“You ridiculous Sue,” protested poor Virginia, who had been joking all the time. “I was only in fun. Why, we have n’t time for it, and beside, where would you get your members?”

“Oh, they would come fast enough. We won’t ask a soul, but, you see, they will come. I will be president, no, chief, that sounds better, because I can whoop ’em up better than you

can, Virginia; but you shall be chief squaw, or medicine man, or any old thing you want to."

"But, Sue, Miss Hope! You will have to ask her permission."

"Not by a good deal! I'll spring it on her, and then if I get called down—"

"Sue, I never heard such slang as you are using; I think you would better start an anti-slang league."

"Oh, dear, I always use slang when I get excited. Well, never mind, what I meant to say was, that I shall establish the club without asking permission of our esteemed principal, and then, if she makes any serious objection, we can immediately desist from operations. Does that suit your ladyship?"

Virginia laughed, for really you can not very well talk of dignity to a girl who is kneeling at your feet, her face alight with good fellowship and fun, at least, not very well, if you are a girl yourself, with your heart hippity-hopping to the pipes o' Pan, as every girl's should.

"But, Sue—" then Virginia hesitated and sighed, "Oh, dear!"

"Out with it, my dearest squaw. We are smoking our peace-pipes in council to-night, and the war paint is all washed off, so don't be afraid."

“Well, I suspect you will call me a regular spoil-sport, Sue, but I’m not going to disobey any of the rules, and I promised your father and mother to try to take care of you. I know that most of the girls break the study hour rule, and think it is great fun, but—”

“Father said, Virginia Clayton, that if I attended to my lessons I was to have the very best time I could, and Miss Sargent said to-day she was very much pleased with my work. I’ve really flunked only once this week, and that was in history, and I don’t care a penny if I did n’t know who Guy Fawkes was, for he was n’t in the lesson, and I guess he was n’t any great shakes, anyway. I am not going to disobey except about not cooking in the room and not going in the halls after eight and study hours, and that nonsense. Those rules were just made to be broken, May Price says, and she’s a monitor.”

“Well, I am not going to,” said Virginia, in what seemed to Sue a most self-righteous tone. “Miss Gribble and Miss Sargent have been so kind to us. Why, just think, even Mrs. Rood and Miss Hope have been here to see our room, and I think it would be a shame to abuse their confidence. If you really mean to have a club, and we may, I think it will be great fun, but I’m

going to be good. You know as well as I do, Sue, that if it was n't for study hours we never would get time for our lessons, for our room would run over with girls."

"What of it?" inquired Sue, tauntingly, for she was nettled by what she considered Virginia's superior manner. "Are we going to settle down to be bumps on a log? Why, I have been stewing up in this room every morning for two weeks, and going to bed at half past nine, when if I was at Cherryfair I'd be flying all over the place and up 'til eleven, and I guess father and Masie know just as well what's good for girls as an old maid like Miss Hope. All the other girls are having jolly times, while we are namby-pambying around here."

"Not all, Sue. You know very well Helen, Alice, Winifred and that set of girls have not, nor Martha Cutting—"

"*Martha Cutting!*" cried Sue witheringly. "I should think you would be ashamed to mention that cat in my presence. Holding *her* up to *me* for a pattern!"

"I am not!" replied Virginia, her head going up in the air and her lips set in a straight line. "You have interrupted my study hour—"

"Well, I shan't any longer," stormed Sue, beginning to unbutton her shoes. "You are

getting too molly-colly for any good use, Virginia. I'm going out for a lark."

Virginia sat perfectly still, a red spot glowing on either cheek, her hands clenched tightly in her lap, determined that the tears that were stinging her eyes should not escape and betray her. At home she would have sailed in high dudgeon from the room; here there was nothing to do but sit silent, biting her lips to keep back the pain.

She watched Sue get herself into her dark wrapper, and slip on a pair of moccasins that her steps might be noiseless, and yet in her mind she was going over and over her talk with Mrs. Roberts upon that last Sunday night. "Virginia," she had said, and Virginia remembered the little tremble in the sweet voice, "Virginia, we are going to trust Sue in your hands. She has been such an unselfish daughter, such a loving, generous sister, that we have overlooked her faults as strangers will not, and I fear we have cheated her out of her share of rightful discipline. She is so impulsive and thoughtless, where you are calm and controlled, and she loves you so dearly she will be led by you. And, I know, too, you will always try to lead her toward the right." Then Virginia remembered

the tender kiss with which her promise had been sealed. She thought, too, of Mr. Roberts's fond "God bless both my little girls and have them in His keeping," upon that last morning. It was so hard for Virginia—it was never easy for her to ask forgiveness, and Sue was in the wrong, and—yet, and—yet—

"O Sue," she said, and then the tears welled over, "O Sue, please, please don't go. Forgive me for being cross, but your dear father and mother—"

In a moment Sue's arms were around her, Sue's cheek pressed against hers.

"There, there," she crooned, as if she were talking to a baby. "Susie was an old sinner, it was n't your fault at all. There, there, honey, don't waste a tear over bad me. I'll be good, indeed I will, honey. I just thought you were showing off a little, and it made me mad. Here we are, all made up, don't cry, don't you cry one more tear."

In ten minutes impetuous, easy-going Sue was cuddled down with her head in Virginia's lap, planning the new club, bubbling over with fun, laughing, talking as if nothing had happened. Virginia tried with all her might to enter into all the happy scheming and to hide the deep

hurt in her heart, but long after Sue was fast asleep she lay in her little white bed with wide open eyes, and when at last she slipped away into dreamland the long black lashes were wet against her cheek.

CHAPTER XVII

SUE'S REBELLION

MISS HOPE was quite right. It was the quietest of the Owls and the gayest of the Doves that flocked to the Minnehahas, and jolly times were the order of the day in Number 21.

So delightful were their regular meetings, and lavish the hospitality—for Virginia's purse was always open, and Sue, for her share, an adept at making something out of nothing—and so much fun was crowded into legitimate hours and pleasures, that as yet there had been no temptation to break rules.

Much to the astonishment of Miss Thaw, Sue inspired by the delights of companionship, and the open admiration of the girls, worked like mad during study periods, and was fast making a place for herself among the leaders of her class.

Miss Gribble was so delighted with Sue's progress in singing that she put her upon the program for the first pupil's recital, much to

Martha Cutting's chagrin, for Martha's faulty tone work was giving her some hours of drudgery she did not at all relish, and in spite of Miss Gribble's assurance that for the dull work now she would make the swifter progress later in the year, she resented the decision as a personal injustice. Her vanity kept her from hearing the difference between the tight, throaty tones that were due in a measure to her own self-consciousness and the velvety, bird-like notes of enthusiastic, unaffected Sue.

To Sue, Martha's sulkiness over her success was not only selfish, but foolish, for, like most girls, her own voice being contralto, she yearned for a high soprano, and the ease with which Martha reached a high note—even if it was pinched—seemed the one thing desirable. Still she was justly proud that she was the only one chosen for the recital among the new girls, and wrote happy letters home of Miss Gribble's praise and of her own joy in the work. Indeed, life in 21 was so delightful that the days tripped over each other's heels, and it was the middle of December before a sudden halt was called, and Sue found she was far from the "perfectly changed girl" of which she had written Masie.

One morning at breakfast Miss Hope made an announcement that fell like lightning out of

a clear sky; this was, that after careful consideration, the faculty had decided no girl, with the exception of those upon the list that could be seen on the office desk, was to be allowed to leave the grounds unaccompanied by a chaperon.

The girls were fairly aghast, for one of their most cherished privileges was that of going alone, or with three or four girls, into the village on little shopping excursions, and just why this rule should fall upon their innocent heads at this time, when Christmas was nearing and frequent errands were necessary, they could not understand.

It was an excited bevy of girls who crowded about the list upon the office desk, though there were three to whom the reason of the new rule was no secret, and who had stolen away to Number 14 to talk it over and discover how they could best evade it.

“If we had been caught by anybody except Thaw,” groaned Nan to Enid and Maze, “this would have blown over, even Miss Hope would have gotten over it in time. Is n’t it maddening to think that she, of all persons, should catch us! Of course, she rushed home to Miss Hope and made her believe the whole school was in it. You should have heard Miss Hope talk to me after you two girls were excused!

I can't come back next year, that's sure. If I had n't been such a hardened sinner perhaps I should have cried, for one can't help liking Prexy, she's so straight. I wonder who will be on that list?"

Sue's name was n't on the list, she saw that at a glance, but when a second showed her not only Virginia, but Martha Cutting among the favored few, her blood boiled and she stormed up the stairs in spite of Miss Sargent's "gently, Sue," and the soothing touch of the hand upon her arm as she flew by.

Miss Sargent stood for a moment looking sorrowfully after the flying figure. She had not approved of the new rule, nor did Miss Gribble, but Miss Thaw's strong will was having a great deal of effect upon Miss Hope as the weeks went by. It was hard to mistrust the judgment of a woman who was such a remarkable teacher, and since the principal saw wild girls, stupid girls, lazy girls come under the spell of her teaching and knew that never before had such monthly standings graced the report cards of Hope Hall, she felt Miss Thaw deserved some part in the management of the school.

"It is horrid," Sue raged to Virginia, after class. "I have n't done a single thing, and

here I am disgraced and classed with Nan Dempcy and that set. I tell you, I'm dangerous if they don't trust me. Father and Masie never treated me like that. I'll show that old Thaw! I will never go out of this house one step with *her*. You see if I do!"

"I'm so sorry," began Virginia. "But I can't help it, Sue—"

"I don't think you are very anxious to help it," snapped Sue. "You can be with Martha all you want now, you are always with her lately, anyway."

"Why, it is because we have French in the same class, and the same hour in Latin. You don't think, Sue . . ."

"That you wish you had Martha Cutting for a room-mate? Yes, I do. Enid Fenno said she heard you say to Martha one day that my noise and clatter made your head ache—"

"And you believed it?" demanded Virginia, standing very straight and dignified.

But at this moment there was a quick knock at the door and before either girl could answer it the door opened and Emma Wills put her head in.

"Come on, Sue, we've got to go for our walk now, and Miss Thaw is to chaperon us."

"Well, she won't chaperon me, by a jugful!"

cried Sue, jumping up excitedly, and in spite of Virginia's cry of entreaty she dashed out and up the stairway to the room of little Dolly Bates, who set up a shout of glee at sight of her.

"O Sue, did you come to tell us a story?" she cried, for Sue was in the habit of entertaining the little girls with tales of the good times at Cherryfair.

"Yes, if you hurry up, Dolly," replied Sue, flinging herself down in a low chair by the window and holding out her arms. "Come quick, chickabiddy!"

It was upon this peaceful scene Miss Vashti Thaw looked some minutes later. Dolly was cuddled up in Sue's lap, while little Faith Rankin and Grace Miller sat at her feet, rapt in the story of Biddy O'Harah, the buff Cochin hen. But Miss Thaw was not in the least impressed by the sweet domesticity of the pretty picture, nor by Sue's absorption in the tale she was telling. The flush on her cheeks, the nervous tilt of her rocking-chair proclaimed, in spite of the calm flow of her words, that she was entirely aware of Miss Thaw's presence.

"Miss Roberts, we are waiting for you," broke in Miss Thaw's icy voice. "Oblige me by coming at once."

But Sue rocked on, only pausing long enough to say, in a high, shaking tone:

"I don't care for a walk to-day, Miss Thaw. I am not going."

"Nonsense!" and Miss Thaw was plainly angry, her nose flattening and her eyes winking rapidly back of her glasses. "Put Dolly down instantly and come with me."

"Sit still, Dolly," commanded Sue, "I do not care to walk to-day, Miss Thaw, so do not let me keep you."

"Do you quite understand what you are doing, Miss Roberts? You know it is Miss Hope's express command that a walk of an hour be taken each day, and you also heard what she said this morning."

The little girls, frightened, begged in breathless whispers, "go, please go, quick, Sue." But Sue, far more angry than wise, rocked on as if there had been no indignant teacher standing in the door.

"I bid you come once more, Miss Roberts. One instant's further delay and I shall report you," the blue eyes were steely now. "You are the most ill-bred, insubordinate girl in the school."

"And you are the most hateful teacher,"

blazed Sue, her face growing white. "It is your fault my name is not on the list, for Miss Hope knows I'm trying to be good; but you . . ."

Before she could say another word Miss Thaw had sailed majestically from the room. The little girls, frightened by the unwonted scene, clung trembling and teary to Sue, but now that her wrath had swept away, leaving her weak and shaken, she put them gently aside and went back to her own room.

To Sue's amazement nothing was said to her of her disobedience and impertinence that day nor the next. She felt ashamed enough of her revolt by this time, and except for that one word, "ill-bred," would have willingly asked Miss Thaw's pardon.

The coldness between Virginia and herself hurt her more than she would have cared to confess. Since the night she ran away from Miss Thaw's summons Virginia was distant and silent; that Sue could believe Enid Fenno rather than her best friend had hurt Virginia deeply, and here, as always, she found it hard to forgive, and so went about sedate and still and left Sue to her own devices. So foolish and perverse had the two girls grown that they knelt to say their prayers upon opposite sides of the bed, and then crept in, cold and forlorn, to lie

as far apart as possible, and no saving sense of humor sent them into peals of laughter that would have washed every bit of ache from their silly little hearts.

It was the third night after their quarrel, and they had sat studying in silence all the evening. Virginia had paid no heed to Sue's frequent sighs, and Sue none to the wan face that leaned so wearily over the book, though she knew Virginia was suffering from one of her nervous headaches, and it had always been her delight to get her a cushion and a footstool, to stroke the aching head and do the dozen little services that had made their friendship so sweet, but each was too proud and obstinate to speak first. The nine-forty-five bell had rung and the monitor was on duty when Virginia was surprised to see Sue deliberately get into her dark wrapper and put on her moccasins, and then stand by the door as if listening. Virginia understood then that Sue was waiting for a signal and that she evidently intended going on some forbidden pleasure.

Virginia closed her eyes and resolutely turned her face away from the tense, listening figure at the door. How her conscience nagged her, and how her better self rebelled! One kind word she knew would bring Sue back to her, repent-

ant and ashamed, would turn her back into the tender, loving Sue, for whom her own heart was longing. But Martha Cutting had done her work well. Those walks to and from class, the little excursions to town, and the closer friendship since they were both on the favored list, had all been used by Martha and used to their uttermost. She was too wise and clever a girl to say anything openly against Sue, but drop by drop she distilled her poison into Virginia's heart, until, without realizing it, Virginia had withdrawn her sympathy. Her heart beat so she felt Sue must hear it, but she closed her lips tightly, while she felt rather than heard Sue give answer to the low pur-r-r-t at the door, and then knew she was alone.

As Sue danced down the long hall she said to herself she had never been so happy in her life, at last she was free, free from that haughty little figure that had been saying all sorts of hard things to her by its silence. She was shocking Virginia, spiting Miss Thaw and Miss Hope, she was showing Nan Dempcy and Enid Fenno she was as brave and gay as they were, and she scampered away to where Maze Wood waited for her in the shadow of the linen closet, chuckling with joy—if a certain unde-

finest pain lay deep in her heart she crushed it back. She was free!

"You are a mighty lucky girl to get an invitation, Sue," Maze assured her, as they crept along in the dark. "Only a few of the Screech Owls are to be there, and you are the only girl outside. But Nancy Jancy said that a girl that was brave enough to face down old Thaw was a girl she wanted to honor. So, really, Sue, this feast is a tribute to you."

Sue tried to swagger, but she couldn't help feeling a wave of shame sweep over her that she had been bad enough to merit Nan Dempcy's praise.

"We are going to have a high old time," Maze went on. "Nan got a big box from home with cake and pickles and things, and we are going to cook weinies over the gas, don't you adore weinerwurst?—and make fudges on Nan's alcohol lamp, and is n't this bully, she got her brother to send her a box of cigarettes. Did you ever smoke one?"

"Tobacco ones?" gasped Sue.

"What other kind are there, silly? Did you want maple sugar ones?"

"Why—why, father got Davie some cubeb cigarettes for a cold. I'd die before I'd touch

one of the other kind, why—why, it's wicked!"

"Oh, of course," said Maze hastily, seeing she had gone too far. "You don't have to smoke them—I never did, either. Enid tried once and got deathly sick, but Nan says it's lots of fun, if you know how. But, anyway, we are going to have a jolly time to spite Miss Thaw. She and that Cutting girl are thick as hops. Was n't it the greatest fun when Miss Thaw complimented Enid on her history this morning, and she had been reading the dates right off her cuffs the whole time? Would n't her old eyes wink if she knew that? Thank goodness, the door is unlocked!"

Through the skylight the moonbeams filtered, turning the bare old gymnasium into a sort of dreamy fairyland, the little stage with its scenery and drapings, the gallery that ran around three sides of the great room, the swinging ropes and horizontal bars, even the chest weights and Indian clubs seemed turned to silver and had lost all their prosaic, work-a-day look.

"You know," whispered Maze, "the door to the gallery is always locked, but we can lift one of the ladders and rest it against the gallery railing and then shin up. It will be lots of fun."

Just where the fun was Maze failed to make

plain, as the two girls tugged and strained at the heavy iron-bound ladder, but little by little they raised it until it stood upright and then began to let it slowly fall toward the gallery railing.

“Careful now,” whispered Sue, breathlessly. “Lift her up there, let her down easy!”

But alas, alas—“the best laid schemes o’ mice and men gang aft agley”—*she* stood, *she* rocked, *she* swayed, and then, missing the railing, with one mighty plunge the ladder fell forward with a crash that reached every waking or sleeping ear in Hope Hall!

Stunned and shaken by the awful noise and their terrific effort, the girls stood for one moment clinging to each other, their eyes staring, their breath coming in gasps, their bodies rigid in expectant fear, and then Maze Wood dashed away toward the one avenue of escape, the linen closet, and Sue was left alone.

Sue heard the door bang, and the key turn in the lock, for Maze well knew the teachers would come down the front hall, and if the door was locked behind her, she could hide in the closet until they had passed, and then rush up the side stairs to 14. That Sue would be caught like a rat in a trap neither troubled nor alarmed her, for, as she explained a few minutes after to

the breathless, laughing girls in Number 14, "Sue's game and she'll never tell."

As for Sue, she was never so frightened in her life, she could hear footsteps coming down the front hall, then the murmur of voices, and it seemed to her as if they were the footsteps and the voices of a regiment. She could hear her own heart beating and the solemn tic-tock of the big electric clock above the door, then, driven by her desperate strait and her overwhelming fright, she suddenly bounded toward the stage, and, falling on her knees, crept behind the curtain that was draped about it. Here it was close and dusty, she could scarcely move without striking some of the timbers that upheld the platform, or knocking over the chairs and boxes that had been thrust under the curtain to get them out of sight. Fairly holding her breath and crouching there in the dust and darkness, the time seemed endless before the door of the gymnasium opened and Miss Hope's voice said:

"The noise certainly came from this direction, but it seems deserted enough now."

After her trailed all the teachers, and Sue, from her peephole, could see them, in wrappers and dressing gowns, each with her candle, as they went from locker to locker, looking behind



SUE WAS NEVER SO FRIGHTENED IN HER LIFE.



screens and investigating corners. It was Miss Thaw who raised the curtain that draped the stage platform. It was Miss Thaw who threw the light of her candle upon the dusty, disheveled little figure, with its tousled black curls and frightened eyes, and it was Miss Thaw who said coldly:

“You need look no further, ladies! Here is the culprit, and I am not at all surprised.”

Never in Sue's short life had she felt so ashamed, so humiliated, as when upon her hands and knees she crept out of her dusty retreat and stood before her teachers. The amazed, yet quizzical, glance of Miss Hope, the sneering smile of Miss Thaw, were hard to bear, but it was the shocked expression upon Miss Sargent's face, the tears in Miss Gribble's eyes that cut her to the heart.

At a word from Miss Hope, Miss Gribble put her arm around the shrinking, trembling girl that stood before them, and led her away. At the door of 21 Miss Gribble kissed her tenderly and said:

“Go in, my dear, and try to sleep, and remember, I love you dearly.” At the kind words Sue clung to her for a moment in silence, and then slipped into her own room.

Virginia, at Sue's entrance, sat up in bed, as

if about to speak, but when Sue, too miserable to look at her, turned her back, she lay down again and made no sign, though Sue tossed wide awake all night.

CHAPTER XVIII

A VAGRANT REPENTANCE

WITH the first tap of the breakfast bell, without ceremony, Maze Wood opened the door of 21, and thrusting in a laughing face, said in a shrill whisper:

“How are you, Sue, old girl? Still alive, I hope.”

Sue had been sitting at the window since daybreak, trying to settle her mind on her Latin. Her pale, anxious face and the dark circles under her eyes told of her sleepless night, and now, without lifting her eyes from her book, she replied dully:

“I’m still intact, with no thanks to you.”

“Pooh, don’t be huffy,” protested Maze, chuckling. “All’s fair in love and war, and you did n’t expect a Screech Owl would be such a duffer as to stay there and get caught, did you? Miss Hope told me only last week one more demerit and I’m done for, and daddy says if I’m expelled it’s a convent next time, and please excuse me from that.”

"I don't know anything about the Screech Owls, but a Minnehaha would scorn to get a girl into a scrape and then lock the door on her. But it's all right; I was an idiot to go in the first place, and my head aches too bad to continue this discussion."

"Oh, I see," jeered Maze, perching herself on a stool just inside the door. "It's a case of 'take thy beak from out my heart and take thy form from off my door,' but I'm perfectly comfortable, thank you, so quoths this raven 'nevermore.'"

Virginia, who had been pinning her collar before the mirror, turned with a look of contempt at this, and said quietly:

"Excuse me, I have n't the least idea what you are talking about, but I don't think Sue is well enough to be troubled this morning. You can see by her face that she is suffering. Won't you have a dose of seltzer, Sue, dear, and let me call Nurse Cheesman?"

"Humph, you don't say," sneered Maze. "I have heard that Nurse Cheesman gives pills for chilblains and broken noses, so perhaps she will have some suited to a Thaw panic," and with this last thrust she was gone.

But, at the first word of Virginia's question, in the old, loving tone, impetuous Sue's arms

had gone out, and now, sobbing and repentant, she laid her head on Virginia's shoulder and poured out the whole story. As Virginia listened her heart sank lower and lower, for she knew with the exception of Miss Sargent and Miss Gribble, the teachers felt that Sue's fascination, not only for the Minnehahas, but for the little girls, as well, was dangerous, coupled, as it was, with her impetuosity and her lack of discipline.

Martha Cutting's scholarship could not fail to attract such a teacher as Miss Thaw, and having once found her way into her teacher's heart through her excellent work, she cultivated it by a dozen little arts, for in delicate attentions and subtle flatteries Martha was an adept. Miss Thaw had no idea she had made a confidential friend of her brilliant pupil, but so cleverly had Martha felt her way that her teacher had few secrets from her, and the one that gave her the most pleasure was that Miss Thaw thoroughly distrusted and disliked Sue Roberts, Sue, her one rival with Virginia and Miss Gribble. From the time she knew this she was careful that Miss Thaw should be kept fully informed of all Sue's peccadilloes, just as she was careful Virginia should hear of the disparaging opinion of Sue held by most of the

teachers, and that she, by her bland questioning, had gathered from Miss Thaw. For Martha soon learned that Virginia longed to be loved and admired by her teachers, just as she learned that her every instinct was toward the proprieties and the conventionalities, and that while her love for Sue kept her loyal, she hated the rollicking feasts and the hoydenish powwows of the Minnehahas that were Sue's particular delight, and that she rebelled inwardly at much she was compelled to take part in.

Now Martha had never stopped to analyze her feeling toward Sue Roberts—she had laid no deep plans nor dark schemes, she was just drifting like many another girl, drifting with the current, the current of her vanity, her jealousy and her great longing to be Virginia's best friend. She knew that while Sue was at Hope Hall she could not hope to win the prize in vocal music, and so must miss her trip to Europe, nor could she hope to be Virginia's roommate, and with Sue out of the way these things so much coveted would be hers.

But Virginia knew nothing of all this, only that Sue, through her own jaunty pertness, had not the standing in the school she should have, that Miss Thaw was suspicious of her, Miss Hope doubtful, and that the other teachers,

with the exception of Miss Gribble and Miss Sargent, felt that her influence was not of the best, and now Sue, by her waywardness and disobedience, had placed herself at their mercy.

“Oh, Virginia,” groaned Sue, “if I had n’t been rude to Miss Thaw that day, and had gone with the girls, I never would have gotten into this. But I knew when I looked into her eyes last night she had never forgiven me for calling her the hatefulest teacher in Hope Hall, and I *was* ashamed of that, and I would have liked to beg her pardon; but she would never believe that now, and just think, I was playing the coward. But I was so furious when she called me ill-bred, and I knew how ashamed father and Masie would have been of me that minute. Oh, what a fool I looked last night when I crept out there before them all—but oh, but oh, what hurt me worst was Miss Sargent and Miss Gribble; they have just begged me to be good and behave like other girls, and not to be so noisy and slangy, and somehow when Miss Gribble kissed me at the door last night I felt as if I had brought disgrace on her, too—and Masie and father—poor, poor father! Oh, Virginia, I can’t bear it!”

“There, there, dear,” soothed Virginia, patting the bent head and wiping her own tears

away. "Perhaps it will come out all right."

"I did n't care a flip about going up there last night, Virginia, I don't like those girls a bit, honest I don't. But I was so glad to get out of here, for you . . . you . . . seemed so sort of far away, and I got desperate . . ."

"Don't, Sue, don't! I can't bear that," moaned Virginia. "It was all my silly pride, I could n't forgive you for believing I would talk against you to Martha, and I just would n't speak first."

"I did n't believe it . . . not really, Virginia, but I was so angry I had to hurt somebody back, and you were nearest. Please forgive me!"

"Forgive you, dear old Sue, there is nothing to forgive. You just said it on the spur of the moment, and I sulked and brooded over it for three days. It is you who must forgive. Your poor head will be much worse if you cry so, Sue. Let me go for Nurse Cheesman and she will cuddle you all up and bring you your breakfast, and you will feel better."

"But promise me, Virginia," begged Sue, "not one word to anybody about Maze Wood or Number 14. I could n't endure they should



"PERHAPS IT WILL COME OUT ALL RIGHT."

think I betrayed them. I could stand anything better than that.”

“I promise, if you will lie down and be quiet. Here is the cologne and the smelling salts; please do, Sue!” So by dint of coaxing and soothing Virginia left a more cheerful girl under dumpy little Mrs. Cheesman’s care when she went down to breakfast.

It was ten o’clock when Sue opened her eyes after her long nap. Virginia had gone to class, and Nurse sat darning at the window. The heavy weight fell on Sue’s heart again, as she caught sight of the squat little figure—for she had been dreaming of racing with Peggy among the apple trees of Cherryfair, and sighing, she turned wearily and closed her eyes.

“Are you awake now, Miss Roberts?” inquired Nurse, coming over to the bed. “How is your head?”

“Much better, thank you. It is too bad you had to sit up here so long.”

“Oh, that is a part of my work, you know. Miss Hope sent up word that as soon as you were awake I was to help you dress and send you down to the office. I hope you have n’t been up to any pranks, honey.”

“Oh, dear,” sighed Sue. “Yes, I have,

nursie, but it's no use being a coward, so I'll get up and get it over with, since it's got to come."

A few moments later, still weak and dizzy, but carefully dressed, her pompadour at its most daring pitch, her big bows waving, her face set in a pale smile, and trying her bravest to look as jaunty as usual, she tripped down the stair and knocked at the office door.

To her surprise there was no one in the office but Miss Hope, and the unexpectedness of it almost dashed her courage. She did n't know quite what she had expected to see, all the faculty in a circle surely, and if they had been cloaked and masked, with Miss Thaw posing as a headsman, after the manner of the pictures of the inquisition, she would have not been so absolutely overwhelmed as she was at the sight of that quiet little figure at the desk, and somehow, as she looked, the reckless bravado she had been trying to assume faded away, and into her impulsive heart crept the sweet desire to act the little woman father and mother thought her.

"Come, Susan, and tell me all about it," that was what Miss Hope said, not lovingly, nor tenderly, as Miss Sargent would have spoken, but strongly, sincerely, as one woman to an-

other, and Sue walked forward and took the chair by the principal and bravely told her story.

She told of her anger at Virginia and Martha's name being on the list, of her rudeness to Miss Thaw, of her longing to apologize, and her foolish resistance of her good impulse, of her quarrel with her room-mate, and then of her desire to punish Virginia's silence of the night before by breaking the rule.

"I can give no names. I am sure you see that, Miss Hope. But every girl you could possibly suspect of being with me was innocent last night. Of that I assure you."

For the first time during Sue's recital Miss Hope's stern face brightened into a smile, the explanation was so like Sue.

"Well, my child, I never ask my girls to tell upon one another, unless it comes to a matter of such proportions that it must be sifted to the very bottom, and even then, I prefer to gather my own information. In this case you are the girl I want to understand. You have acted as foolishly as I would have expected, but you have been very frank in your explanation, and I believe absolutely in your truth, Susan. Virginia Clayton is your best friend, your truest friend, in that she tries to lead you toward the right.

No doubt she has her faults; I have been dealing with girls thirty years, yes fifty, for I was a girl once myself, and I have never found a single angel among them; each has her particular fault or faults to conquer and control. You quarreled with Virginia, but she is your loving friend, for she has been with me pleading for you and taking much of the blame herself; then, too, Miss Gribble and Miss Sargent have been in to plead your cause; and so, you see, my dear, you can not suffer all the pain of your wrongdoing; it falls on the hearts of your faithful friends, whom you never dreamed of hurting. The reason for insisting upon chaperons I do not care to go into, but it was a good and sufficient one. I placed Virginia and Martha upon that list because they are always quiet and ladylike. Not a teacher has to say to them, 'More quietly, please,' 'not so loud,' 'more gently,' but how many times a day is that said to you? I hope to see the time when Sioux the Indian becomes Susan the true woman, but that can only be through your own efforts. We can only hope and wait. From your demerit I can not rightfully save you and it is to be your punishment that now at this happy Christmas time your report card must bear a black mark. It is because of your really

strong work in your classes and your unselfishness among your mates that you get off so easily this time. A girl who has so much influence as you have, Susan, among not only the girls of her own age, but the little ones as well, who is as ready and willing to do kindnesses, and who is naturally as cheerful and buoyant, ought to do a beautiful work in her school, but if, in spite of these God-given traits, she prefers to be rude, noisy, untrustworthy, then she must take her place among the goats—every school has them—and my gentle sheep and my guileless little lambs must be guarded from her influence; it all lies with the girl herself. Perhaps you have never thought of it in this way before. And now I hope, Susan, you will come back after Christmas to make the most of yourself in every way. You are excused.”

CHAPTER XIX

A SERIOUS TRIFLE

SUE'S trouble at Hope Hall had come too near the Christmas holidays to attract much attention from the girls. Even if she was more meek—they had no time to exclaim over it, as their poor brains were in a turmoil, divided between the agony of examinations and the rapture of going home.

The report card Sue carried to Cherryfair showed excellent standings with one exception, in the lower corner, opposite the word deportment stood that ugly black cross. Sue was glad to slip into father's study the very first hour of her return and tell him all about it. His reproof, coming on the first night, after he had been parted from his little daughter for four months could not be very strongly expressed, especially as perched on his chair with an arm around his neck, she abused herself so roundly and was so very magnanimous toward everybody else. Indeed he was completely disarmed by her tactics and found him-

self taking her part with a good deal of vehemence.

“There, Sue,” he laughed and said: “you are the same little Irishman; I see, Miss Hope has n’t taken that out of you. You ought to be well scolded and shut up in a dark closet, but instead you get the kiss and laugh you were angling for. But remember, daughterling, the discipline I do not give you must come some day. Every little moth is sure to get her wings singed, if she won’t keep away from the candle flame.”

And this was her dismissal, instead of the stern lecture she so richly deserved. Away she danced for a “lovering” with Masie, a game of blind-man’s-buff with the children, then to help Mandy with the tea, and be, as she expressed, “Johnnie-on-the-spot all over the place,” forgetting utterly, for the time at least, the shoulder to shoulder talk she had had with Miss Hope.

There were reasons why Mr. Roberts could not bear to cast a shadow over Sue’s holidays, for he knew he must tell her, before she returned to Hope Hall, that he would be forced to resign his ministry and go to Mexico for the winter, leaving the dear ones alone, and that in the spring Cherryfair must find a new ten-

ant; for the Roberts family, who had been so happy beneath its dilapidated roof, were to find a new home in Chicago where Mr. Roberts was to go into business.

But Sue, when father and Masie told her the night before she returned to school, was, as always, before the inevitable, brave and cheerful. She reassured them wonderfully, and grew so very merry over the idea of father well again, and the wonderful fortunes that would befall them in a big city, that she promised again and again that not a single thoughtless act of hers should bring another shadow, now that they must stand by one another in troublous times—poor little pie crust promises, but none the less sincere at the moment.

To Virginia the two weeks spent at Cherry-fair seemed the most delightful of her life. She had been wise enough not to tell Sue of Martha's urgent invitation to be her guest at Christmas time, for the Roberts family felt Virginia belonged to them and she had her own particular place in every heart at Cherry-fair.

Martha was farther from understanding the friendship than ever, but in spite of Virginia's unswerving loyalty she felt Sue must surely soon fall into a pit of her own digging. Mar-

tha was not aware that she meant to hasten the catastrophe, but she certainly did not mean to throw out a lifeline. There was so little of this on the surface that volatile Sue went back to Hope Hall thinking at last Martha and she were quite good friends.

So it happened that Martha was in Number 21 the day Virginia's belated South American Christmas gifts arrived. Among them was a little box addressed to Sue, and in it was a quaint silver bracelet with a cunningly wrought clasp in which was a tiny key hole.

"The key to this I wear on my watch chain," wrote Thad, "for it seems as if somebody ought to have Susan Plenty on the end of a chain."

"Pooh," sniffed Sue, trying to force the pretty trinket over her plump hand, "and how did he expect I was going to get into the thing when it's locked and he has the key! Isn't that just like that absurd boy?"

"Oh, you see," Virginia explained, "Father has sent me one just like it, except that yours has topaz set in the links where mine has garnets, and my key will unlock yours. Here, let me try."

Sue looked on with frowning brows while Virginia fitted the bracelet to her wrist, and

snapping the clasp, locked it with the little key. She stood quite still for a moment looking at it and then she said beseechingly, catching a quick breath:

“Please take it off again, Virginia. I can’t stand it. It makes me think of handcuffs and jails and things. Ugh, I hate it! I believe I would die if I had anything locked on me. I can’t get my breath.”

“You absurd girl,” laughed Virginia, but somehow she fancied Sue’s cheeks had grown paler and she hastened to unlock the little chain. “You will lose it if it is n’t locked.”

“No, I won’t, for I’ll keep it in its box,” chuckled Sue, hiding it deep in the pink cotton wool. “It was awfully dear of Thad to give me one just like yours, Virginia, but there is something in me that rebels at authority or discipline, or any thing that does not leave me free, free, free! It’s so good to be alive when you can do exactly as you please and I’d a lot rather be dead than locked up, I don’t care who carried the key.”

“Foolish old Sue,” laughed Martha condescendingly, jealousy tugging at her heart that Thad had sent Sue the pretty gift, but she was somewhat comforted by Sue’s disregard of it, for surely Virginia would not like to have her



THE DAY VIRGINIA'S BELATED SOUTH AMERICAN CHRISTMAS GIFTS ARRIVED.

brother's gift so slighted. "Just as if we were not all held fast by duty. The discipline has to come sometime."

"I remember the time, I was about three, when Aunt Serena tied me with a thread because I ran away and I almost went into convulsions. She was pretty glad to break that thread, I can tell you," laughed Sue, "and I felt the same way about the bracelet, a minute more I would have been kicking and screaming as I did then."

"You are a strange girl, Sue," and Virginia put her arm about her. "You are so good and unselfish, and yet I never knew any one who hated so much to obey. Now, I don't mind that a bit."

"And I," replied Sue, returning the embrace vehemently, "don't care what they do to me, so long as they let me have my liberty. Oh, girls," she cried a moment later, as she was locking away the bracelet in the drawer of her desk. "Here is a box of cubeb cigarettes father got for Mandy's cold when I was home. I brought them along for a frolic and forgot all about them. Let's each smoke one. Have one, Martha?"

Sue did not explain that she would never have thought of bringing the cubebs to school

if Maze Wood had not put it in her naughty head when she told her of Nan Dempcy's escapade.

"I don't think I care for one, thank you," replied Martha, sniffing daintily at the box Sue offered her. "I don't like the smell of them, what are they, anyway?"

"Oh, just some spicy little berries ground up. They are fine for some colds, Dr. Burton told father about them. They're awfully jolly. Come along, Virginia, I heard you sneeze one day last summer. Let's be sociable."

But Virginia, after a whiff or two, declared she had plenty, so foolish Sue, thinking she was horrifying Martha—she did so love to shock Martha—put her feet on a chair in as mannish an attitude as she could assume, and puffed away, pretending to enjoy it immensely.

"That was lots of fun," she assured the girls when the cigarette was reduced to ashes and Martha was giving affected little coughs. "I'm going to lock up these cubebs with my bracelet, and some night when the Minnehahas are here we'll crush 'em up—the cigarettes, not the 'Hahas—and smoke 'em in a peace pipe. Wouldn't Miss Thaw's old eyes wink if she could see in that drawer, and wouldn't she love to catch me smoking. Beg pardon,

Martha, I'm always forgetting she's a friend of yours. She has no love for Susie."

"Well, whose fault is that?" asked Martha, sarcastically. "I don't think you cultivated her very assiduously; have you, Sue?"

CHAPTER XX

THE END OF SIOUX

CHRISTMAS vacation being over the girls had flocked back to Hope Hall quite ready to settle down to good hard work. Nan Dempsy returning with an indigestion, and Enid Fenno engaged, proved in Miss Hope's opinion blessings in disguise, for Nan was so cross and disagreeable that Number 14, for the time at least, lost its attraction, and Enid was so self-satisfied and patronizing, the Screech Owls unanimously voted her a bore, and so, lacking a leader in their mischief, settled down to their books in real earnest.

The Minnehaha suddenly turned itself into a philanthropic organization, for Sue had awakened to the fact that her washer-woman was a widow with six small children and she beset the "'Hahas'" with the most impassioned enthusiasm, working them up into such hysterical sympathy that Miss Hope was forced to call a halt, or it is doubtful if they would have possessed a shoe or stocking, to say nothing of

ribbons with which to bedeck themselves. Even good Mrs. McAdoo and her children were thankful of their rescue for there is such a thing as being drowned in charity and the McAdoos had certainly been well soused. Feeling deeply chagrined at this interference and the seeming ingratitude of their victims, the Minnehaha formed itself with dignity into a book club and grew so superior that even Miss Thaw smiled frostily upon them. But Miss Hope remarked to Mrs. Rood with a shrewd smile:

“It is as well to be prepared just now for any catastrophe. This isn’t normal. We are entirely too exalted and great will be our fall. I am just holding my breath.”

But with Nan, Enid and Sue subdued for a time, the girls kept earnestly to their work. Beyond the everyday failures to be expected, there was not a single black mark during the first month, and as this beatific state still continued into the second even Miss Hope became unwary, and when Miss Gribble finding that Washington’s birthday fell upon Friday, their regular gala night, suggested to the faculty a fancy dress party, there was not a dissenting voice.

There was great rejoicing in Hope Hall when

the pretty invitations, on the well-known violet paper with the violet seal, appeared.

“Martha Washington and her friends will be pleased to meet “Pocahontas” in the music-room upon the evening of February twenty-second, from eight until ten,” was the invitation addressed to Miss Sioux Roberts instead of to Susan Plenty, as was Miss Hope’s usual way. While Virginia’s was for “Molly Ball,” much to her joy.

“And oh, and oh, you can’t guess who’s going to be Martha Washington!” sang little Dolly Bates skipping down the hall, for Dolly had an unerring nose for news and had a way of tantalizing the older girls into giving her all sorts of bribes for allaying their curiosity.

“Pooh, that is n’t worth a picayune, Dolly,” snapped Nan Dempcy, “go along and take your noise with you, goosie; everybody knows it is Miss Hope.”

“But it is n’t, it is n’t!” shrieked Dolly. “You are as cold as ice—guess again!”

“Miss Thaw,” guessed Enid, with a grin. “She’d make a charming Martha. She looks like a clothes-pole wrapped in a flag in that new gown she’s wearing.”

“It ’s no such thing, and it is n’t Miss Sargent, nor Frauline, nor anybody you would ever

guess. Nurse Cheesman told me, because I took my cod-liver oil without making a fuss. But I'm not going to tell," chanted saucy Dolly capering about on the tips of her toes. "I know . . . I know . . . but I'm . . . not . . . going . . . to . . . tell!"

Enid darted toward her, but Dolly was too quick and ran straight into Sue's protecting embrace, as she came out of the music-room.

"What's up, Dollykins?" laughed Sue, whirling the child up in her lithe young arms. "What have you been doing to Enid?"

"Oh, I know something I won't tell," jeered Dolly from her refuge. "But you are my particular friend, so I'll tell you. It's who is going to be Martha Washington and it's a dead secret."

"You don't say," replied Sue, when in a shrill whisper Dolly had parted with her news. "Is she much?"

"Much!" cried Dolly, incensed that Sue should take her wonderful secret so stupidly. "Much! Why, she's the dearest, darlingest, *precious*est thing you ever saw! Isn't she, Enid? It is Miss Hope's mother and she's coming to-day."

This, to the girls who had been at Hope Hall

long, was good news, indeed, for the "little Madame," as they lovingly called Mrs. Hope, was a great favorite, and Miss Hope always laughingly declared she could only allow her at the Hall on especial occasions, as she would soon have the girls utterly ruined by indulgence.

She came that very night, and if Sue had failed to appreciate the news of her coming she was enthusiastic enough over the little old lady after seeing her to satisfy even Dolly, who, being an orphan and left in Miss Hope's care, knew her mother well.

Mrs. Hope was the tiny original of her daughter; white hair, black eyes, delicate coloring that reminded one of an old water color, but with a motherly smile that dazzled. So quick was she upon her feet, so playful in her manner, so winning in voice, so sweet in spirit that the girls trooped about her and fairly wailed over the stupid study bell that called them to duty.

If Sue and Virginia were anxious to appear well at the party before Mrs. Hope's arrival they were now frantic in their desires to look their very best. "Silks and blankets, fans and warpaint, combs and feathers, slippers and moccasins"—both talked at once, and one grew so bewildered by the other's brilliant ideas it is a

wonder that Molly Ball and Pocahontas did not appear before Martha Washington and her friends in a marvelous tangle. But, strange to say, matters straightened themselves out beautifully, after some patient work, and in Number 21, upon the night of February twenty-second, pirouetted joyfully a most fascinating Molly Ball.

Aunt Sibyl, who fortunately had returned to Kinikinnick just in time, had sent Virginia her great-great-grandmother's corn-colored silk gown. There was a family tradition of how the little great-great-grandmother had stepped the minuet with General Washington in that very gown, and of how he had gallantly kissed her hand at parting; but, be that as it may, she could have been no more bewitching than her little black-eyed descendant. With her powdered hair piled high upon her head, a warm flush on her dusky cheeks, her eyes sparkling under her black arched brows, her slender throat lifted proudly from the lace bertha, Virginia looked the grand dame to perfection. Not a detail had Aunt Sibyl forgotten—the corn-colored satin slippers were great-great-grandmother's own; the strands of amber beads, the quaint yellow lace fan that hung from an amber chain, and the great tortoise-

shell comb that reared itself above her head—George Washington himself might well have kissed her little brown hand.

“You’re a dream, Virginia,” cried Sue, “a perfect dream!”

“And you, oh, Sue, I hate to say it,” gasped Virginia, with a shudder, “you’re a nightmare!”

For Sue, realist to the core, had utterly refused to appear as the charming, poetic Pocahontas, of whom, without doubt, Miss Hope was thinking when she had invited her. The Indian dress with its beads and wampum was partly hidden under the Navajo blanket, her long black braids hung from under her feather bonnet, but her bright, sparkling face was hideously transformed by bands and circles of red and yellow and blue, that she had coaxed Martha Cutting to paint upon it with her water colors, and Martha, who was to be the daintiest of Priscillas, nothing loath, had laid the colors on with lavishness.

“Oh, Sue, it is n’t too late yet,” begged Virginia. “Please, Sue, dear, I love you so much and I can’t bear to see you make yourself so ugly.”

“Ugh, ugh!” grunted Sue, fastening a paper knife, and an old hair switch she had borrowed

of Nurse Cheesman, to her belt. "Me heap big Injun!"

"You're horrid," pouted Virginia. "I'm sure Thad would n't—"

"Pooh, me big brave! Me no care for pale face boy," chuckled Sue, brandishing her tomahawk dangerously near Virginia's precious comb. "Me scalp his sister if she don't shut up. Whoop-e!"

"Oh, Sue, do be good," protested Virginia. "I forgot to tell you, two strange ladies have come since dinner. Enid Fenno said Miss Hope was so surprised and delighted to see them. One is that lovely deaconess, Miss Pennypacker, your aunt's friend."

"Ugh, ugh! Me big Injun. Me no 'fraid of white squaw," grunted Sue provokingly.

"Oh dear," sighed Virginia, "I suppose it is no use, you always will have your own way." But just then she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror, and a girl can't quite despair if she looks as if she had stepped from some old painting, even if her best friend does insist upon being a scarecrow. So dropping a reconciling kiss on the tip of Sue's nose, the one spot that had escaped Martha's brush, she sailed away, leaving Sue, who was determined upon making a more startling entrance.

The music-room was all a-buzz and a-bustle when, fifteen minutes after "Molly Ball" had made her advent, an Indian, half crouching under a gay blanket, shuffled in gloweringly. The dainty Puritan maids, the demure little Quakers, and ladies of high degree stopped on the instant in the midst of their merry babble to catch their breath in dismay, and then suddenly understanding, a gale of laughter swept the room. Not so with the little Dutch girls, in their stiff starched caps and long skirts, they shrank away trembling—even Dolly Bates, failing to recognize Sue, ran as fast as her clattering wooden shoes would let her to hide behind Martha Washington's brocade skirts, and from that refuge take scared peeps at the slouching, muttering figure.

"Good gracious!" giggled Nan Dempsy. "Just wait until Miss Hope sees her. Sue Roberts always does think of the most outrageous things. Won't old Thaw fall in a faint?"

"I'd hate to make such a guy of myself, even to spite Miss Thaw," whispered Enid, loud enough to reach Virginia, who stood with Martha Cutting clenching her hands to keep from crying out; for if foolish Sue had looked a fright in the privacy of their own room, here

under the lights and among the daintily dressed girls she was impossible. Though Virginia tried her best to smile the clutch of shame at her heart sent the blood flying to her face.

But Sue was happy. She was making exactly the sensation she had wanted, the big girls were laughing, the little ones were quaking, and she herself had dared what not another girl in Hope Hall, not even the redoubtable Nan, would have ventured.

“Push her to the front,” urged Enid, her naughty heart beating high in anticipation under the meek, drab folds of her Quaker garb. “Come on, Nan, we must be there to see.”

Crowding closely around the grotesque figure the girls pushed Sue rapidly down the room toward Mrs. Hope, who dressed as Martha Washington stood with her daughter and the other teachers in line. Sue felt to her finger tips that the girls were expecting something unusual in behavior to match her attire. To simply look weird and mutter she felt would be stupid, and the Minnehahas, some of whom had been in her secret, would never forgive her if she should be flat after attracting so much attention. She must do something startling, something thrilling, and be quick about it.

Higher and higher rose her spirits as she

heard the giggling girls elbowing behind her. She was quivering with excitement, her cheeks burning beneath their paint, her black eyes dancing, all thought of propriety, of courtesy, of common civility whisked from her brain by her mad desire to do something daring. Even the sight of the tall, dignified stranger, who looked at her in astonishment, only made her folly more headlong. Unluckily Sue did not see the trim little lady in gray who stood at the end of the line and whose eyes were flashing.

“You George’s squaw?” inquired Sue, shaking Martha Washington’s hand vigorously, quite unmoved by the shocked expression on the kind old face. “Him no tell lie, him did it with his little tomahawk. Him heap big chief.”

Rewarded for her audacity by the snickering of the girls behind her, she passed down the line. “How, How!” was her greeting to Miss Hope, who as Lady Kitty Duer, stood next—even Miss Gribble’s low “careful, Sue, careful,” had no effect, and mounted now on the crest of the wave of her foolish excitement and hilarity she stood before Miss Pennypacker ready for anything.

This was Aunt Serena’s famous friend—the tactful, dignified woman, whom Aunt Serena had told her so many times would be so shocked

by her rude, unladylike behavior. A madder impulse seized Sue. She would test the quality of the lofty example that had always been held up to her. Behind her Nan whispered and Enid laughed. They thought she was afraid of this tall woman who looked down on her saucy, painted grin with such calm grace. Sue fairly burned to distinguish herself.

Then, all in a flash, she snatched the switch and the wickedly gleaming paper knife from her belt, threw herself forward to grasp Miss Pennypacker by her back hair, and with a wild whoop brandished her weapon and the flying switch like a scalp above her victim's head.

There was no doubt Sue had made her sensation. The girls fairly shrieked with laughter for a moment, then at the sight of Miss Hope's flaming face they fell back frightened and dismayed. But for Sue herself there had been a more startling outcome, for hardly had she swooped forward when a voice made her turn aghast.

"Susan! Susan Plenty Roberts! Let go this instant! How dare you!"

There was no mistaking that voice; those flashing eyes, nor that stern, set face, pale with righteous indignation. It was Aunt Serena Fulton's voice, it was Aunt Serena's hand shak-

ing her by the arm, Aunt Serena's very self, and someway in that horrified face for the first time in her life Sue saw herself as she really was.

She did not need to look into the burning faces of her teachers, nor see the dismayed glances of the girls. She did not need to hear Miss Hope's quick, low "Go to your room, Susan," nor Virginia's suppressed sob, as she pushed forward to her side.

"Come," whispered Virginia, "come away, Sue."

Up the stairs they crept together to their own room to hide Sue and her disgrace, that dear room they had left so gaily such a little time before. If Virginia rebelled against Sue's folly she did not show it, and indeed it would have taken a harder heart than hers to have been anything but kind to that trembling girl; her face pale through the disfiguring paint, her eyes strained and staring.

"Cry, dear, cry!" urged Virginia, the tears streaming down her own face, as with shaking hands she helped Sue off with her feathers and beads. "I can't bear to see you like that, Sue. Please let me call Nurse Cheesman."

"No, oh, no!" moaned Sue, wringing her hands helplessly. "Go back, Virginia, and

leave me alone! I've disgraced you and everybody! Oh, Virginia, if I could only get away, if I could only go home! But I don't think I could ever sing 'Whoopsy saw, sine craw,' nor dance with them all again."

"Poor old darling, poor old girl!" and Virginia pressed Sue's head to her breast.

"I was horrid, perfectly horrid! And I meant to be funny! Oh, I don't know what I did mean, I was swept away by my silly desire to show off. But, oh, Virginia, I never knew . . . I never *knew*, until I read it in Aunt Serena's face . . . I'm *awful* . . . I'd *hate* to have a daughter like me . . . I should think father and Masie would die of shame! Miss Hope, and dear Miss Sargent, they tried to help me, and Miss Gribble whispered to me to-night and I never listened. I just went on, and on, and *on*! And now it will all come down on father and mother, and on Aunt Serena, and she sent me here. She's been kind to me all my life . . . most of the pretty things I have had she, or Uncle David have given me. Why even then I was spreading around in her gifts . . . Oh, I've been such a fool, such a silly, wicked idiot, Virginia! Phil said once they would send me home and I just laughed at him, and Betty

said if they did I would be a family disgrace
. . . think of that . . . *I* a disgrace
. . . and oh, I am . . . *I am* . . .
but Phil, dear old Phil . . . he said that
he would always stand by me . . . oh, if I
could only see him . . . and Aunt Serena
. . . it's no wonder she does n't come to see
me . . . but I would go to her if her heart
was broken . . . I would . . . no dif-
ference how bad she had been, and oh, Vir-
ginia, I want her so!"

"Do cry, Sue dear, your eyes look as if they
were burning," begged Virginia with her arms
around her. "Perhaps it is n't so bad after
all."

"Virginia Clayton!" cried Sue starting up
and grasping Virginia's arm so tightly it made
her cry out. "Tell me this; did I, or did I not,
act like a wild savage . . . a girl you
would *scorn* to know?"

"I . . . I could n't believe you were my
Sue," faltered Virginia, "not the dear Sue of
Cherryfair . . . and oh . . . and oh
. . . I just wanted to catch you up in my
arms and carry you away! Oh, what made
you do it, Sue, what made you? If Nan Dempey
. . . "

“No, no, she would n’t, not even she,” groaned Sue, falling back on her pillow. “Oh, I wish I had never thought of calling myself Sioux! It’s no wonder Mrs. Rood laughed at my card. I remember father said once he did n’t believe a Sioux squaw would be as rude as I am sometimes . . . Oh I had better die, Virginia, for I never *can* be a nice, good Susan girl . . . I will just always have to be a wild, whooping Indian,” and then, for the first time, Sue’s tears came, and burying her head in the pillow she sobbed as if her heart would break.

Virginia feeling that this was much better for her than the wild, strained excitement let her grief have its way. Her own heart was very, very heavy, for Sue would be expelled, she felt sure of that, and she knew of the sorrow that would bring to the loving hearts at Cherryfair and to Mr. Roberts alone and ill in far off Mexico.

By and by Sue, worn out by her grief and shame, lay quite silent, brooding over the trouble she had brought upon them all, and Virginia, in answer to the ten o’clock bell, made ready for the night. They heard the girls come up and go trooping past their door. Poor

Sue as she caught the sound of their gay voices shuddered and felt her cheeks burn. How could she ever look at them again?

Just as Virginia was about to turn out the light there came a gentle tap at the door and little Mrs. Hope, still in her brocade, came softly in. It seemed to penitent Sue that no vision was ever more lovely than that motherly old face, nor no sound more sweet than that gentle voice.

“Dear little daughter,” she said, sitting down by Sue and taking the hot hand in hers. “I couldn’t go to sleep until I came to say good-night and God bless you.”

CHAPTER XXI

MISTAKEN LOYALTY

IN the gray dawn of the morning Virginia was aroused from her sleep by the closing of the door, and opening her drowsy eyes she was astonished to see it was Sue, who had just come in.

“Why, Sue?” she questioned sleepily; then the memory of Sue’s trouble rushed in upon her, “Oh, Sue, dear, where have you been?”

“Hush, honey, hush,” and Sue, her eyes shining softly, came running to snuggle down beside her. “Oh, Virginia, you can never guess, but I just couldn’t sleep, so I slipped away to Aunt Serena, and oh, I’m so glad . . . so glad I did! I never knew her before, Virginia, never at all. She cuddled me up and comforted me, just as Masie would have done, and we cried together, and she told me how she loved me, and how she longed to help me. She says—Virginia, think of this—that I don’t need to be an Indian, that the day may come if I try from this time on, when we will be *thankful* for

last night. It doesn't seem so now, does it? She says she blames herself that she did not tell me that the reason she has been so anxious for me to be good was because she was such a madcap. Not so bad as I am, I don't suppose, Virginia; I don't suppose anybody was ever so bad as that. And oh, I shall never forget how good she was; and she says I must be a woman and take my punishment bravely, and if Miss Hope feels she cannot overlook my conduct, I must not blame her at all; for Aunt Serena made me see how much Miss Hope owes to each of the girls, and if I'm . . . oh, dear . . . it does hurt so to think that . . . if I am a detriment to the school, it is her duty to send me away. But she said out of this failure I may build a lovely character, and that a young girl always suffers so over her troubles because she can't look beyond and see the great beauty that time and patience may bring from what seems the very end of things. Then she kissed me and told me she was going to try to help me more than ever; and I promised, not one of my old promises, but we just both promised God together, that I'll work, and work, and try, and try, and I'll grow, some day, into a sweet, good woman, like Masie."

“And I’ll try with you, Sue,” sobbed Virginia, “we’ll both do our very best.”

“Together,” whispered Sue. “This is to be the hardest day of my life, but I’m going to *try* to live it true and brave and strong; I’m going to try to be a woman.”

But in spite of resolutions it was hard for Sue to eat her breakfast alone in her room, to hear the girls go whispering past her door, to know that in a few moments she must appear before the faculty, and to feel that through her own foolishness she was in such disgrace. It was not always possible to think bravely of her father’s sorrow—since she had failed after promising so faithfully to be careful for his sake—nor of Masie’s grief, and she had none of the old bravado as she stood knocking at the office door.

There was no doubt that at last Sue was appearing before the faculty. She felt her courage ooze as she glanced about the room and saw each teacher in her place. No, there was one vacant chair, and Sue wondered dully why Miss Thaw was not there. But just then she saw Aunt Serena’s face and saw her hand outstretched. How gladly she walked across the room and stood by her side!

Sue was so frightened and bewildered she

hardly realized that Virginia, too, had entered the room and had gone directly to the desk, nor that Miss Hope, after some hesitation, had bowed assent to her low entreaty, and that now Virginia's hand was clasped in hers.

"Susan," began Miss Hope sternly. "Of course, there is no need to tell you why you have been called before your teachers. Nor need I, I am quite sure, tell you your behavior last evening was beyond the bounds of what could be tolerated. Last night I was your hostess, as well as your teacher, and you outraged my hospitality, insulted my honored guest, and brought discredit on the whole school. You remember when we had our other talk you promised me faithfully to do your best, and since then I have been proud of your marked improvement. I was never more astonished, nor humiliated than last night. What excuse have you to offer?"

"None," replied Sue brokenly. "I had no idea of doing any thing dreadful when I came downstairs, but somehow I wanted to surprise you all . . . and . . . oh Miss Hope, I don't ask you to excuse it, but please let me tell you all how sorry and ashamed I am."

"And please, Miss Hope, won't you let me

plead for Sue," Virginia was very pale, but her voice was firm and clear. "Do you remember when I came to you about her other trouble you said that we could none of us help her until she would see herself as others saw her?"

"I do," replied Miss Hope gravely.

"And now . . . oh, Miss Hope, Sue never, never in this world wants to do a startling thing again. She wants to be a Susan instead of a Sioux, she really, truly does!"

"Is this a fact, Susan?" inquired Miss Hope. "Are you at last willing to be led rather than to lead? I have no place in my school for an Indian brave. I want gentle, winsome girls."

"I . . . I never want to hear the name of a Sioux again," cried Sue. "I can't tell you, Miss Hope, how I loathe it!"

"That is the best news we could possibly hear," Miss Hope's face relaxed. "And now answer me this, Susan, have you broken any rule since your return?"

"Oh, no," replied Sue earnestly.

"I am afraid Miss Roberts has forgotten." It was Miss Thaw who spoke. She had come in so quietly they had not noticed her, but now she came forward with a contemptuous toss of her head. "I believe it is the unwritten law in every school for young ladies that ciga-

rette-smoking will not be tolerated under any circumstances, yet I have positive proof that within the last fortnight not only has Miss Roberts smoked cigarettes, but she has also tried to entice two of her schoolmates to smoke with her."

"It is not true!" exclaimed Sue, starting forward.

"This is a very grave charge, Miss Thaw," replied Miss Hope, motioning Sue back. "You say you positively know this to be true?"

"Ask Miss Roberts to give me the key to the right-hand drawer of her desk and I will prove it to you."

"Oh!" gasped Sue and Virginia together.

"Why, Miss Hope," cried Sue beseechingly, "it is only some cubebs that father got for Mandy's cold. It was foolish of me, but surely it wasn't so very wicked. I brought them back to school with me and the other day I happened to run across them when Martha Cutting was in our room and I offered one to each of the girls, Virginia just whiffed one and I, to shock Martha, sat with my feet up on a chair to smoke mine. It sounds so silly and . . . horrid now, but then . . . it was only fun. I locked up the box with my bracelet in the desk

drawer and I really had forgotten all about it. Miss Thaw is welcome to my key."

"Is this true, Virginia?" asked Miss Hope sternly.

"Yes, Miss Hope, and I am sure none of us had an idea there was anything wrong about it."

"You are quite certain, Sue, that these were only the cubebs, and that your father bought them?" asked Miss Hope again.

"I am sure, Susan is telling the exact truth," said Mrs. Fulton, softly. "I have never known her to be anything but absolutely truthful."

"I too, have always found her so," replied Miss Hope, "and I cannot doubt her now. Miss Thaw, I am sure this is only a bit of girlish folly, there has been no intentional wrongdoing, but to make all mistakes impossible you may take Miss Roberts' key, if you please, and bring whatever you find in the drawer."

Neither Sue nor Virginia had the slightest doubt of the outcome, and Sue smiled frankly at Miss Gribble and Miss Sargent and lovingly pressed Aunt Serena's hand.

A few moments later Miss Thaw, her very skirts rustling triumphantly, laid upon Miss Hope's desk a little flat white box and in gold

letters upon it was printed "Turkish cigarettes."

"I see nothing about cubebs on this, Susan," Miss Hope's face was very set and stern. "That was a very clumsy falsehood, for even I know these are tobacco."

"But Miss Hope," cried Sue, blushing deeply at the accusation, "that is not my box at all! Mine was bright red, and with the name cubebs on the outside!"

"Miss Roberts!" Miss Thaw's voice was trembling with anger. "Do you mean to imply I did not find this box in the locked drawer of your desk? To prove it to your entire satisfaction here is the only other article in the drawer, this little box in which is a chain bracelet."

"What can it mean?" faltered bewildered Sue. "That is not my box—"

"Susan," in Miss Hope's face Sue could see no mercy. "How dare you again—"

It was Virginia who interrupted, Virginia, so white and shaken that Miss Thaw put out a hand to steady her, but whose voice was firm:

"Sue is quite right, this is not her box, that was red. This must be mine. Sue is perfectly innocent. She knew nothing about it."

"Virginia, Virginia, it is n't true," cried Sue

impetuously. "She thinks I will be expelled and she is trying to save me. Oh dear, dear Virginia, to think I, by my folly, should bring you . . . It breaks my heart. There is not a word of truth in it, Miss Hope. Oh, Miss Thaw, please help me make Miss Hope see it couldn't be Virginia's. You know it isn't true."

"Your confession would clear her at once—"

"But I can't, Miss Thaw. I can't confess to what I haven't done, can I? I'm not brave enough to lie even for Virginia. I do not understand it at all. I put a red box in the drawer and have never unlocked it since and Miss Thaw found this! Of course any of the desk keys would open my drawer, but why should any one want to? Virginia says it is hers, but I know, oh, surely all of you know there must be some mistake!"

All this time Virginia stood with her head erect, her eyes fixed directly upon Miss Thaw. There was no other outward sign of emotion, she was absolutely cold and hard to all Sue's wild beseeching.

"This is certainly a strange case," and Miss Hope rested her head wearily upon her hand. "As for Sue's escapade last night it was small, indeed, compared to this grave offence and the

falsehood to cover it—if it is a falsehood, which I much doubt. But if Sue is telling the truth, this must be settled at once. I wish, Miss Gribble, you would call Miss Cutting.”

Martha Cutting came, gentle and sweetly smiling, as always.

Yes, she had been in Number 21 the day Sue had offered them the cigarettes. Yes, Sue had said they were cubebs, and had wanted her to take one but she had disliked the odor and refused. Yes, Virginia had taken a single whiff and then she, too, had declined, but Sue had smoked one and afterward locked the box up in her desk, and said she would give them to the girls of the Minnehaha in a peace pipe. Yes, it was she, Martha, who had told Miss Thaw, for she felt the other girls might be tempted.

“Why did you not come to me?” inquired Miss Hope sternly. “And do you mean that you thought the cigarettes were tobacco?”

“I suspected it, as the odor was very disagreeable.”

“Can you identify the box?”

“I . . . I think so.”

“Is this it?”

“Yes—I think it is.”

“Oh Martha,” cried Sue, “don’t you remember, my box was red?”

“I think,” went on Martha, paying no heed, “the box was white and gold.”

“Then you are sure this is the box?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Miss Clayton says Miss Roberts is right, that her box was red, and contained cubebs, and that this box is her own. How can that be?”

“I . . . I don’t understand,” gasped Martha, suddenly growing very pale. “Why . . . O Miss Hope, that can’t be true,” protested Martha, “she’s trying to save Sue. Surely you do not suspect *her*.”

“No more than I suspect Sue,” returned Miss Hope icily. “This matter must be sifted to the bottom. I wish you girls to go to your rooms and stay there until I send for you. Ladies, I must have time to think this over.”

“Aunty, Aunty Hope!” it was Dolly Bates who had tiptoed softly into the room where Mrs. Hope sat reading, her heart heavy over the trouble that had fallen so suddenly on Hope Hall. “Aunty Hope, please, may I talk to you?”

“Indeed you may, Dolly,” said Mrs. Hope,

lifting the child to her lap. "Why, you have been crying, darling, what is the matter?"

"Oh, Aunty," and Dolly's lip quivered, "Enid Fenno says Miss Hope's going to send my dear Sue away. We little girls cried and cried, and so did Nurse Cheesman, I saw her wiping her eyes; for, don't you see, Aunty, Sue's the very best friend we have. When we get colds and have to stay in she comes and rocks us, and sings and hears our prayers, and on rainy days she tells us stories and makes fudge. Nursie says she don't know how she'll get on without her. But that isn't what I came to tell you. It's about another girl that I just hate—"

"Oh, not hate, Dolly, you don't hate any one."

"Well, I don't like her, anyhow. This morning I was in Sue's room, all alone. I often go in there and hide behind Sue's screen, then when she comes I cry 'Boo!' and she pretends to be scared, and catches me up and swings me in among the pillows, and we have the best time. Well, I was hiding there this morning when I thought I heard her coming, but it was n't Sue at all, nor Virginia, it was that other girl, and she went right to Sue's desk, and she opened the drawer with a key, and she took out



"I WAS HIDING THERE THIS MORNING."

a little box, and then she put in another, and then she went away.”

“I think you are mistaken about her putting a box in the drawer, Dolly, it was Miss Thaw, was it not?”

“No, it was n’t, Aunty, it was Martha Cutting, and I just crept right out after her, and she went down the hall, and down the stairs, ’til she came to the bellboy’s room, and she put the box on his table, away down among some papers, and when she was gone I went in and got it, for it’s my Sue’s, and she had no business a-giving it to Amos,” Dolly explained, as she struggled to get the box out of her mite of a pocket.

At last the box lay in Mrs. Hope’s hand. It was bright red, and upon it in raised letters was the word “CUBEBS.”

CHAPTER XXII

THE BEGINNING OF SUSAN

THE breeze of June sent shimmering ripples across the ivied walls of Hope Hall. Above the tower a flag floated, and the pillars of the great veranda were wound with pink and green, the colors of the senior class.

Girls in dainty gowns and fluttering ribbons rushed to and fro, and busy teachers moved among them, pausing to subdue spirits that seemed poised too high, or to breathe courage into the shrinking few, who, with vacant gaze, muttered to themselves for the thousandth time the words of their oration, or hummed the vagrant air that threatened each moment to slip forever from their treacherous memory.

“I never can do it!” groaned May Price. “I’d rather never be graduated than to stand up before that crowd. I get as far as ‘We are about to set sail in our little painted ships upon the great ocean of life,’ and then everything is black before my eyes. For pity’s sake, Nan, what comes next?”

“ ‘Shall we float in safety upon its mighty bosom, or shall we be wrecked upon its treacherous shoals?’ ” glibly quoted Nan. “ ‘There is n’t a soul in Hope Hall that does n’t know it by heart, except perhaps it’s Helen Campbell, and she is so daffy over her ‘Browning’s Relation to the Universe,’ that she does n’t know if she is up hill or down dale. I met her on the stairs a minute ago and she positively clung to me, begging me to try to remember the next sentence after ‘he looms on our mental horizon like a Colossus of Rhodes.’ ”

“ ‘Great King,’ said she,
 ‘Have mercy on me, or else my name is Mud.’ ”

chanted Sue, who was flying by. “ ‘Cheer up, May, honey, I’ll mind the ‘little painted ship’ place; so look at me and I’ll give you a boost. But just breathe a prayer, please, that I don’t slip off the key in that last cadenza, for if I do my heart will be broken up into little bits.’ ”

“ ‘No danger of her failing,’ ” said May, as Sue hurried on. “ ‘Does n’t she sing that aria beautifully? I’m awfully glad Miss Gribble put her on the program, if she is only a Freshie. I don’t believe I ever saw a girl improve as much in every way as Sue in the last few months—even Miss Thaw had to admit that

yesterday, when Miss Sargent showed her Sue's standing in geometry, and Sue does hate it so."

"Oh, Sue's all right; she is the most forgiving soul that ever breathed. Martha Cutting would have waited many a cold day before I should have forgiven her."

When Sue had first understood that Martha had really plotted against her—it was so foreign to her own frank and generous nature she found it hard to believe—she thought, too, she could never forgive her. But that was when she believed it was for the prize of music, the trip abroad, and Miss Gribble's praise that Martha would have sacrificed her; when she came to see it was love of Virginia that had been Martha's chief temptation, she forgave her at once.

Martha was on her knees before her trunk when Sue, after waiting vainly for her "come in" opened the door.

"O Martha," she began; but at first sight of that tear-stained face her heart melted with pity and she ran to her side. "Please, Martha, let me help," she begged. "I can pack beautifully. You go and lie down and rest. Let me bathe your head and make you comfortable, do, Martha, dear."

"You . . . you . . ." gasped Mar-

tha; "why, Sue Roberts, you don't mean you want to be kind to me! Why, I . . . I was wicked . . . Oh, Sue, I never . . ."

"There, there, dearie," and Sue's arms were about her, holding her close, "don't you feel so bad, if I'd been as good as I ought to have been it never could have happened. It was my slangy, wild ways that turned Miss Thaw against me, and my first disobedience that made Miss Hope suspicious. I'm going to try to do better now, so it may all turn out for the best."

"For you, perhaps," sobbed Martha; "but, oh, Sue, never for me. I am so ashamed, so disgusted with myself. Miss Hope is right, it was my . . . my foolish vanity and jealousy that made me do it. I did love Virginia so, and she never seemed to care for anybody but you . . . but now she will never want to see me again."

"Oh, yes, she will, Martha," comforted Sue. "Just give her a little time. She did love you dearly, it was only—well, you see, she was my parsley-girl in the very beginning. And I was n't always just to you, Martha, and Virginia tried to please me, but she will forgive you, I know she will."

But it was, after all, Virginia who suffered most through Martha's deception. Martha her-

self, although bitterly humiliated and ashamed at the time, was too egotistical to ever see the real depths to which she had fallen. Sue, with her usual buoyancy, soon rebounded, and while the affair had made a lasting impression upon her character, it was perhaps the presence of Virginia's silent suffering that sank deepest into her heart.

It took Miss Hope a long time to draw from reticent Virginia the real reason for her extraordinary conduct. She had felt, she admitted at last, that her expulsion would make no great difference to any one. Her father would consider the cigarette smoking a girlish freak, and Thad would only be amused over the whole matter, while Sue's disgrace would bring real anguish to the loving hearts at Cherry-fair, to whom Virginia felt she owed so much, beside, knowing that Sue was innocent, yet having no idea who had done the cruel trick, her one thought had been to save Sue at all cost.

"My child," Miss Hope had said, taking the cold little hands in hers, "there is one lesson we all must learn: one should never do wrong, believing good will come of it. We may only do right, leaving the result to God."

Even after Virginia knew Martha was to

be sent away, she found it hard to forgive. But when she saw Martha enter the carriage that was to take her from Hope Hall forever, Virginia's heart melted, and flying out to the carriage she sprang upon the step.

"I forgive you with my whole heart," she whispered, kissing Martha tenderly, "and I hope you will be happy in your new school. Good-by, good-by!"

But now Hope Hall had reached its commencement time, and every one was in gala dress and gala mood, and all the troubles of the year were in the past.

Virginia's Aunt Sibyl had decided to run over from Monroe to say good-by to her, as Virginia was to go on at once to New York to see her father, who had returned from his long trip the week before. Mrs. Marshall said nothing of the great surprise she had for the girls, so when she arrived with Thad, well, strong and sunburned, there had been a great jubilee in Number 21. And Sue, since they could n't wait for Virginia to write a verse for the occasion, insisted that "Whoopsy saw, sine craw" be sung then and there.

The graduating exercises passed off beautifully, in spite of dark prophecies. To be sure, May did stumble over her little painted ships,

but Sue, true to her word, gave her an encouraging nod, and formed so plainly with her lips "shall we float in safety," that nobody but the two girls ever knew of the awful moment. Sue herself swept down her cadenza in fine style, and Helen settled Browning's place in the universe in a blaze of glory.

Some hours later when Hope Hall was radiant with lights and tuneful with music and the hum of many voices, Sue and Thad sat on the stair together to enjoy an ice, and watch the pretty scene.

"It has been a beautiful year, in spite of its troubles, has n't it, Thad?" asked Sue, waving a gay salute to happy May, who passed down the hall on her father's arm.

"The best of my life," agreed Thad, "when I think what a flunk I was in when I found I was n't going to college this year it makes me laugh. Why, Sue, I've gained points with those men, not theories, you know, but real, practical knowledge that I should n't have gotten in my whole college course."

"And now you are back so well and strong! I guess, Thad, God always knows what's best for us. I thought I was coming to Hope Hall to study music and geometry, but I have found the hardest thing was to govern myself, and I



"TELL HER, THAD," WHISPERED VIRGINIA.

have a good deal to learn in that branch yet.”

“I rather miss the old Sioux, with her florid speeches, though,” laughed Thad. “I’m afraid of this dignified Susan.”

“You need n’t be; for, alas, I have n’t lost all my picturesque language. I find it is n’t the easiest thing in the world to forget. And I’m not really Susan, I’m just beginning to be.”

“You see,” said Thad, showing her his watch fob, “I still carry the key, though, I believe, you refuse to wear my bracelet.”

“Oh, no,” laughed Sue, holding out her hand that he might see, “I’ve got it on to-night. Don’t you tell a soul, but Virginia sewed it on with a good, strong thread, for I just would n’t have the thing locked—could n’t get my breath if the key turned, Thad.”

“Queer old girl; I don’t know but I like you all the better for it. You’ll settle down some day, Sue, and never mind the padlock, see if you don’t.”

“I don’t believe it. I can’t imagine myself doing anything but dancing along at my own sweet will. But is n’t it lovely, Thad, about father? He’s back from Mexico, so much better that the doctor says he need not give up his preaching entirely, and he’s doing splendid work in a mission in Chicago.”

“And Cherryfair, Aunt Sibyl tells me, is deserted.”

“Yes, that was hard; but Mandy went with them, and Masie writes they have a house on a dear old square, and they are learning to love their new home almost as much as Cherryfair. Of course, you know I am not coming back to Hope Hall next year. Whatever shall I do without Virginia, that is what I’m wondering?”

“Tell her, Thad,” whispered Virginia, who had just joined them, settling down like a little pink cloud among her ruffles at Sue’s feet, “tell her, it’s too good to keep.”

“I don’t know, Nixie, whether Sue will consider it very good news or not; but the truth is, Sue, Dr. Yoder has accepted a professorship in the Chicago University, and, as he is taking a great deal of interest in me, father has decided I would better go there next year.”

“And, oh, Sue!” cried Virginia, “I’m to go to visit you both at Christmas time, and—”

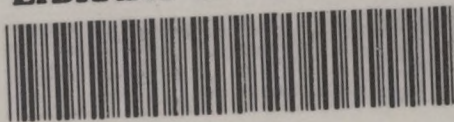
“Well,” sighed Sue rapturously, “I can only say with Betty, ‘I always thought we had the most beautiful things happen to us a family ever did, and now I know it.’”

THE END





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